

IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

A Novel about the Rapture

By

Marcia Peterson

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated, with gratitude, to "Sylvia" and her family...

REAL CHRISTIANITY

A year ago, I was living in a skilled nursing facility. After five years of struggling with severe physical problems, my doctor and I discovered it wasn't because I was dying.

Rather, over several months of titration, we discovered I'd been on double the amount of insulin I'd truly needed. My doctor is an excellent physician with a kind manner and listening ear.

As a result of being on the correct dosage, I no longer needed the facility.

I chose to leave the home (it was not mandated) for the sake of wanting to find a way off of my Disability. I wanted to sell one of my books. (It became obvious later, I couldn't do this and still survive.)

My choice at the time was probably a foolish leap of faith. I became instantly homeless as a result.

The true Christianity I speak of follows...

Over the time I've been homeless, I've lived in many very

difficult and sometimes forced situations. Until this last few weeks...

When it became apparent I'd have to go back to a very good shelter, I panicked. I'd nearly died due to complications with pneumonia just weeks prior. This was because the shelter couldn't keep me indoors while I was gravely ill.

I sent up a "deliver me" prayer and contacted everyone still interested in speaking with me at all. This included my friend "Sylvia."

"Sylvia" is a friend from many years back. She's part of a lesbian marriage.

She and her partner immediately provided me with my own room, any food I needed (I'm challenged this way) and a very kind and caring environment.

I was very blessed with God's answer! Their family is the picture of real Christianity.

Yesterday, when one of the rescued dogs they'd taken in became ill, I stepped out of my room and into the puppy's doo doo.

I didn't notice my situation until I'd tracked the stuff through my room.

"Sylvia," refused to allow me to clean up the mess I'd

made.

She needed to prepare for work. Still, she got down on old hands and knees and cleaned up the mess herself at my protest. She refused to be unkind.

"Sylvia" is a Christian lesbian. she and her partner attend a church well known for its outreach to the LGBT community.

They both have been greatly abused. All throughout their life stories. They aren't perfect, yet, but none of us is or can be without God's work in our lives.

These were the types of people Jesus befriended in His time on earth. We're all broken people in need of His merciful care.

The moral to this story for me, is...

Watch who you say is unworthy of YOUR kindness!

Jesus will probably disagree!

INTRODUCTION

The story of Carissa Littleton begins at the Rapture (given from a pre-tribulational view--debated for many centuries.)

IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE tells of Carissa's experiences in heaven, where she quickly discovers her destiny.

Our God and His heart for mankind are key components of this book. His heart is astonishing. His love is beyond reason. Our

futures are incredibly blessed, and worth every moment of hardship and personal failure.

The story is a fictional depiction told from a biblical perspective. I endeavored to draw from 40 years of learning and personal study of the various contents within this book.

Carissa's is a wildly honourous perspective. She (and through her the reader) is given a view into eternity and the seven year preparation for our positions in the Millennial Reign of Christ Jesus.

This book offers the opportunity to watch the Lord Jesus rule, relate and even judge as He might today if this were the day of His return. As King of kings and Lord of lords.

Someday, possibly soon, we may have an opportunity to see what Jesus will actually do.

This book endeavors to offer hope, comfort and an exciting view into our promised eternity to come.

Thanks for reading,

Marcy Peterson

MY PRAYER

Father, I have no idea how to convey the wonders of who You are. I ask that those reading these words will check You out and not merely my words. What I have to say is insignificant. You're the One who matters.

Open up the eyes of everyone reading about Your incredible love. Help them seek You and find You. I ask that they discover for themselves the awesome love You are. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHAPTER ONE

With a suddenness Carissa couldn't have anticipated, her world turned upside down. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, she found herself standing in the clouds surrounded by friends and an endless crowd of strangers, people she knew in that instant would be her forever friends. Brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins, whether her physical relatives or not, stood in the clouds with her.

The Lord Jesus, who was probably standing in the clouds on the other side of the world, somewhere over or near Jerusalem, had apparently collected those who were His whether living or once dead. Carissa knew they were all about to begin eternity together.

Carissa's weightlessness stemmed from far more than the fact that she stood nearly still but elevated in the clouds. She knew her life would never be difficult again.

Everything had changed. Every ounce of difficulty, which had dogged her throughout her years, she knew would now be lifted.

As small as she felt today, Carissa knew she'd never need to be someone special to be precious to God. Eternity had been her hope. It had been her promise. It would now be her reality.

In the brilliant sunlight, with the sun's warmth penetrating her heart and soul, Carissa felt the beauty of this historical moment. For those who stood with her in the clouds the rest of eternity would be beautiful.

For the poor souls who remained on the surface of the earth,

significant difficulties were just beginning. The Tribulation would occur at the same time God's people were lifted into heaven. The struggles she'd seen would be nothing compared to what the rest of the world would now experience.

Sadness swept over Carissa with the thought. At the same time, excitement enveloped her for what was about to happen to her and the rest of those who stood with her in the clouds.

As the next swift event occurred, a full out shout seemed to fill her lungs and empty into the air involuntarily. It was a shout of sheer thrill. Everyone else around her also shouted simultaneously.

With a torrent of excitement and the strong presence of God, Carissa felt herself lift higher and higher until she flew through the atmosphere and beyond.

As she flew, she left behind stars and galaxies, nebulae and interstellar gasses that captured her excitement in stunning colors she couldn't begin to describe.

A man dressed in white linen seemed to fly beside her. He was far younger than Carissa. She looked over at the man and he smiled brilliantly. He looked nearly like one of the powerful angels she'd heard had visited various prophets and others in the Bible.

In a magnificent way, the man was beautiful beyond anything she'd ever seen. He seemed to shine like the sun, both emotionally and physically. Carissa couldn't help wondering if she shone just as brightly. She felt she most certainly must have.

All at once the scenery changed. Carissa found herself standing in a huge auditorium filled with opulence and endless rows of tables set with luxurious place settings.

It reminded her of a convention hall reserved only for those with extreme wealth. This hall, however, awaited the accommodation of every soul who'd ever been saved through Christ's death on the cross. Again Carissa felt a wave of beautiful excitement.

Each place setting exuded wealth. Each seemed to await various guests, each was individually different, and each held a transparent gold place card with a name inscribed in light.

Carissa wondered where her place setting was. As the thought entered her mind, she suddenly found herself standing before a setting she found particularly beautiful. It was exquisite and held her favorite colors and designs that seemed to suit her perfectly. The place card confirmed the setting was meant for her.

As she ran her hand around the large crystalline gold plate that held a smaller set of purple and green plates, she surveyed the cut crystal stemware and silverware embedded with purple and green crystal designs. She couldn't imagine anything more stunningly beautiful.

With a sense of excited anticipation, Carissa looked at the name plates on either side of her. Sue Johnson and Carol Fairing were women she hadn't seen in many years! She was quite excited with the thought of reconnecting with the women who'd played such a vast part of her survival and spiritual maturity.

Looking over at a distant wall, Carissa saw the wall was made of mirrors. She was thrilled with the idea of seeing her new eternal

body.

She'd never been beautiful and as the years had progressed, her little bit of beauty had diminished with heavy signs of aging.

Carissa was a little over 60. Her husband had not been a believer. She understood he would not be there among her new friends. She'd hoped, prayed and tried to be a good example to her husband, but he'd never taken God's offer of this eternal life. She couldn't help but wonder why.

As the crowd began to discover their seating arrangements and God-ordained places among the people of God, Carissa decided to sit in her personally designed chair and await the coronation of the King of kings.

The names of two others she did not know were on either side of Carol's and Sue's place settings.

As she noted their names, the man she'd seen flying beside her toward heaven suddenly appeared in the seat next to Sue's. Carissa nodded and smiled.

TWO

The man who'd looked so much like an angel returned Carissa's smile. He tilted his head and looked at her as if puzzled. She offered her handshake and introduced herself, "Hi, " she said, "My name's Carissa Littleton."

"I know," he said, "I was your guardian angel."

"Seriously? " she asked.

"Yes," was all he said, but his smile shone brilliantly once again. "Did I do a good enough job?"

Carissa nodded her head indicating yes. She smiled just as brightly. "Thank you!" she said. "I always wondered what I would have gone through without heavenly help."

The angel nodded with a sense of the dire truth of her statement. "I pulled you out of some very dangerous situations," he said.

"Oh, please, I hope you'll tell me the stories someday!" she said gleefully.

"I'd love to."

"So, you know me well then?"

"Very well, actually. I look forward to introducing myself to you more fully as we become more acquainted. You were my last assignment. The Lord cared greatly for you. There were many times I disappointed Him. The way people treated you for one."

Carissa bowed her head in shame. "They didn't seem to like me

much."

"To the Lord's chagrin," the angel said, "but I'm saying too much. The Lord Jesus will want to let you know your place in His Kingdom.

"Your judgment probably won't be one of the first. But you will be very happy with your obedient heart when He does bring your life before His throne. He was quite happy with your choices."

"Why?" Carissa's surprise was strong and genuine.

"Love." The angel's answer was surprisingly brief, but Carissa understood what he meant.

She'd worked hard to love God with all she was in obedience to Jesus' words. Then she'd worked hard in difficult situations to love others as He'd also said. She hadn't received much love in response.

"What's your name, if I may ask?"

"I'm Jordanya," he said, "but most angels call me Jordi."

Carissa shook her head in wonder. Angels were just like them. Pretty much. "May I call you Jordi?"

The angel smiled and nodded. "I'd be honored."

Just then Sue appeared between the two of them.

"Sue! Is that you?"

"Yeah?" she said, "and you are?"

"It's Carissa; Carissa Littleton."

Sue's smile widened. "I didn't recognize you, girl! How are you?" Sue reached over and gave Carissa a gigantic hug.

"I've been struggling pretty hard," Carissa said, "until now."

Sue snorted in her usual way. She looked entirely different, younger than when Carissa had known her well. She'd been about 35 when Carissa knew her and that was about 30 years ago!

Today she looked only a little older than about 20 and stunningly beautiful. Her eyes were the same pale blue color they'd always been. Her hair was long, strawberry blonde, and held a gorgeous wavy sheen.

The sweetest part of her beauty, however, was the brilliance of her demeanor. She was happier than Carissa had ever seen her. Carissa imagined Sue was at least as happy as she felt now.

"What do you think might happen next?"

"I don't know," Carissa confessed. "Maybe we should ask my guardian angel, Jordanya."

"Your guardian what?!"

Carissa chuckled. "May I introduce you to my guardian angel, Sue?"

Sue turned to notice Jordi and seemed startled some. "Wow," she said. "Your guardian angel. I suppose mine's on vacation!" she said wryly.

"No ma'am." A gigantic being with feathered wings stood to the other side of Jordi. He looked pretty much like a soft, sweet but

gigantic and strong man, seven or eight feet tall, more than a little plump, with a wingspan of about 10 feet!

This time it was Carissa's turn to be startled. "Oh!" she exclaimed, holding her hand over her heart.

"I'm sorry Carissa," the angel said. "I didn't mean to startle you."

Carissa chuckled nervously. "Thank you," she said softly.

"I'm your guardian angel, Sue," the angel said. "Name's Serino. I'm a little bigger than Jordi, but I'm also a little scatterbrained. The Lord assigned me to care for you. Jordi and I have been friends since you and Carissa met.

"We were the ones who hooked you two up. We thought you'd make good friends. Too bad you had to move away, Sue, and Carissa lost touch with you."

"We were both hoping you'd be close friends for life," Jordi said with a sense of regret. "When Sue moved to South Decota, and we couldn't work with each other directly, we stayed friends from a distance, Serino and I."

As they each sat down in their places and continued their conversation, a huge and very brilliant angel came out from behind a thick velvet curtain and trumpeted a shofar.

Little by little the roar of the crowd stilled to silence. The angel then began to speak. Apparently every soul in the gigantic hall could hear him clearly. He was announcing the Lord Jesus.

Carissa's heart nearly stilled. The moment was one of awe mixed with loving worship. And then the brilliant angel walked backward away from the center of the stage and the Lord Jesus

appeared.

THREE

In the back of Carissa's mind, a phrase from a song she'd sung in church many times played as she watched the King of kings and Lord of lords, God in the flesh, walk into their lives.

She couldn't see Him nearly as well as she wished. From her distant seat, the Lord looked tall and handsome. Much like the pictures of Him she'd seen on her friends' walls and in bookstores over her years on earth, with one exception. His coloring was far darker, more like the Middle Eastern nationality Jesus actually was.

The nearly quiet roar of the crowd was filled with the sound of awe. She almost expected everyone to applaud the Lord. Instead, a hushed gasp seemed to fall over the crowd.

As the Lord cleared His throat and began to speak, not a single soul dared to breathe much less interrupt Him with their own words.

The Lord's voice was clear and strong. He was speaking in a language she did not know, most likely Hebrew. As He spoke aloud in His own tongue, she heard the translation of what He said in the sound of His own voice but within her mind.

His discourse was puzzling to her. He wasn't exactly angry. Nor was He as joyous as she'd thought He would be. His words seemed sad. He seemed disappointed.

A feeling of soft conviction began to sweep over her as Jesus Christ, the Son of God Almighty, wept openly in front of the

people. Carissa could hear the hushed sobs of His people throughout the auditorium.

She could almost hear His tears fall. His words pierced her heart. She understood how much emphasis she'd placed on temporal things during her lifetime, and how little emphasis she'd placed on eternity.

The thought that she'd been one of the millions of people who'd made her Lord weep brought a painful sadness to her heart. Her own tears began to flow.

Within a matter of a couple of minutes, the entire auditorium was swept up in weeping. Her heart beat with soft intensity. She couldn't bear the thought that her selfishness had brought Him such sorrow.

It wasn't that she felt guilty. It was more a feeling of gentle compassion. Apparently, most of those in the auditorium felt pretty much the same.

As the Lord continued speaking to His people, Carissa listened attentively to every word. She had no idea how long He spoke, but as He did, her heart and life began to take on new meanings.

It wasn't all wasted, this she understood. He'd been able to do much through them. Apparently there had been so much more yet to do by the time He'd come.

Then, as people all over the hall wept softly, the Lord held out His arms and told them all, "I've loved you with an everlasting love. Don't be afraid. Come, enter the joy of your Lord." Jesus then walked down into the crowd with two angels beside Him.

Carissa would have given anything to be one of the people He'd chosen to speak with first. She wasn't, of course. It might take another million years to receive her ten minutes face to face with the Lord Jesus.

There were many millions of people within this crowd. All of them wanted to be near Him. All of them wished they were the ones He would have chosen to speak with first.

FOUR

Carissa turned to Sue, who sat heavily in thought. Her eyes were moistened with tears. Carol had sat on the other side of Carissa. She'd been taking notes!

"Carol?" she asked her old friend softly.

"Hi," Carol said, smiling gently. "I noticed someone had placed you next to me. How long has it been?"

"Too long," Carissa confessed. "I think I was in my mid twenties when I saw you last."

Carol smiled. "Were you still on earth when we were raptured?"

"Yes! I guess I never stopped to consider any alternatives."

Carol nodded. "I was not."

Carissa was very surprised. "Heavens!" she said. "I had no idea you'd passed."

"It hadn't been long," she said.

"Then you must have had a very different experience in the Rapture. Not to mention before!"

Carol smiled softly once again. "Very."

"What was it like before the Rapture?"

Carol sat back in her seat. Her smile widened and she took on a look of strong amusement. "It was incredible," she said. "No one knew. They didn't have a clue."

A moment passed as she seemed to try to put words to her experience.

"The most prominent part of life in heaven was the knowledge that everything was fine. And we knew we were deeply loved. We could watch what was happening on earth. We knew all was not well there. But I guess you could say it didn't seem to matter. Everything was perfect anyway."

Carissa felt strong curiosity. "Did you have a body?"

"Not really. We could see each other but it was... different."

"How so?"

"We... I guess it was almost like a very vivid dream or imaginary trip, only very real."

"Wild!"

"That would be accurate."

"Was it frustrating?"

Carol shook her head, indicating no. "It was just... different."

Carissa shook her own head in wonder. "I was always so afraid of dying. Not death, but the process of getting there. Was it difficult?"

"Um hmm. I didn't like it much. No matter how beautiful heaven is, death still troubles the soul. It took every ounce of faith I had to hold on and let it happen."

"What happened when you arrived?"

A peaceful smile swept over Carol's face. "I had family here."

They met me and introduced me to my new life. But it wasn't long before we gathered together to await our resurrection. Only a matter of days."

"Wow!" Carissa was filled with awe. She was glad she'd never tasted death. Being one of those who'd made it to the rapture still living was a definite perk. The difficulties associated with dying were something she would never know.

Carissa turned away allowing her overwhelmed heart to gather itself and calm down a little. It was too marvelous, all these things happening at once. She could barely contain her emotions.

At the same time, she wondered what could possibly happen next.

FIVE

As the Lord continued working somewhere in the crowd, the same exceptionally brilliant angel came back out from behind the gigantic curtain and lit the entire stage.

This incredible angel began speaking to the crowd in some very unusual language. It was nearly sci-fi. The sounds he made were extremely different from any Carissa had heard.

He was apparently speaking with the other angels. She noticed she did not hear the translation in her mind this time.

Looking over at Serino and Jordi, Carissa saw that the two of them listened to the angel intently. Jordi seemed concerned. Serino seemed more or less amused.

Carissa was extremely curious. She also knew what was happening wasn't any of her business. If she was meant to hear it, she would be hearing it now. Still, curiosity flared. And then it simply stopped.

Sin was no longer part of her heart. If she wasn't meant to know, she honestly didn't want to know.

Instead of thinking about it any further, she took a long gaze around the room. She wasn't sure how she'd know who was who here since every soul was fairly young and quite a bit more beautiful than they had originally been.

At this point, she saw the wall of mirrors and knew it would not be sin to see her new body. This curiosity, she knew, would be

allowed.

Standing to her feet, Carissa noticed her legs held no discomfort. She'd been sitting for hours, yet she didn't seem in the least uncomfortable. In fact, this was the first time she'd noticed how wonderful it felt to be a newly created eternal human.

As she walked toward the wall, a man she recognized but only a little walked her direction and stopped.

"Do I know you?" she asked.

He looked at her with a slightly confused and yet amused gander. "I'm not sure," he said. "My name's John Baisel. Does that ring a bell?"

"John Baisel," she repeated with a foggy sense of recollection. "Did you know Meridith Baisel?"

The light seemed to go on in John's mind. "My wife!" he exclaimed. "Are you Carissa Littleton?"

"Yes!" she said excitedly. "Now I remember!"

"My wife passed a couple of years ago."

"I'm so sorry, John." Carissa was afraid to ask the next question. It seemed his answer wouldn't be comforting. "Did she ever receive Christ?"

John's sad demeanor told her Merideth had not.

"I loved her so much," he said. "I hoped and prayed she would, but she never did."

"I understand," Carissa said. "Neither did my Frank."

He gave her a strong look of compassion. "Then you do understand."

"Yes."

"I suppose it's the only malady there is in this incredible place. We're probably all grieving the loss of friends and family."

"You're probably right," she said. "I would imagine even the Lord Jesus is grieving to some degree."

"From what He said earlier, I believe you may be right." The look on John's face said what Carissa was thinking. She couldn't imagine God would be grieving any less than she was sure most people were. He'd lost so very many people all at once.

"Are you heading toward the wall?" he asked her with a grin.

"Actually I am," she said with a sheepish grin of her own.

"Shall we?" he asked, holding out his arm as only a gentleman would.

"Yeah!" she whispered excitedly. As they walked toward the wall, Carissa felt a strong wave of excitement.

Then she caught a glimpse of John in the mirror. The next vision was something she could never have anticipated.

SIX

The look on John's face said more than Carissa could have thought. At first he seemed to be looking at her while she was looking at him in the glass.

When she caught sight of her own body and face, Carissa's jaw dropped.

Her hair was a gorgeous mixture of pale blond strands, where she'd once had frizzy dark hair that seemed to lose control in every way, her new tresses were what she'd always wished she'd had.

Her face was more heart-shaped with a more strongly striking jaw line and higher and more prominent cheekbones than she'd had previously.

Her coloring reminded her of wearing some kind of natural makeup. It was natural alright. She wasn't wearing a stitch of makeup.

Even her lips looked like she had applied lipstick. But when she tried to remove the color and sheen, they would not come off!

In addition, like everyone else, she looked barely mature; very young. Like everyone else, she was about twenty two or three in appearance. The whole affect was wondrous.

"Are you seeing what I'm seeing?" she asked John quietly. She nearly whispered the words.

All John did was nod his head with a sense of his own disbelief.

He stood staring at his reflection until he broke away, shaking his head in wonder.

"I never remember looking like this!" He whispered his words, showing the same emotional reaction Carissa was having.

Carissa's smile widened with the reality that she found their responses more than a little amusing. As her amusement grew, she couldn't stop herself from laughing.

"You'd think we were altogether too much into ourselves!" And then her mild laughter became more and more difficult to control.

As John caught her joyful feeling, he guffawed as well. Until many people around them began to look at them strangely. Carissa merely pointed at her reflection and continued to laugh.

Little by little, a small crowd began to join in their laughter. Some people just held their hands over their mouths, stifling their laughter.

John was the first to retain his composure. He took Carissa, who continued to giggle, by the elbow and led her away from the crowd now laughing at themselves in the mirror. Through broken chuckles, he asked her where she was sitting.

"I don't know!" she admitted sheepishly.

"I think all we need to do is pray to be there," he said with a still beaming smile.

Carissa nodded her head in agreement.

"Father, would You help us find Carissa's chair?" he prayed.

Carissa caught her breath as they both simply appeared before

her chair.

"That's amazing!" she gasped.

With a shake of her head in wonder, Carissa sat down in the chair where she might truly want to spend the rest of eternity. Then she thought twice about her sentiment.

She wanted to do and learn so many things. Sitting in this chair would probably prevent her from completing all she wanted to do. "What's next?" she asked John.

He simply shrugged his shoulders and waved goodbye before disappearing.

Carissa smiled and fought off the urge to laugh once again.

"Where'd you go?" Sue asked her.

"Off on a wild adventure with an old friend," she replied with a slight chuckle.

Carol turned toward Carissa and said, "You've been looking at yourself, haven't you?"

Carissa merely began to laugh again.

"It's an incredible gift isn't it? I did exactly the same thing as soon as I arrived after the resurrection. I didn't have a body when I first got here. I was so curious."

"Did you laugh like we did?"

"Yes!" Carol looked down at the table, apparently trying to contain her own laughter, but didn't succeed.

As the two women laughed with each other, Sue began to giggle

without knowing why Carissa and Carol were laughing. This made all three of them laugh until they cried.

Serino and Jordi looked at the three of them like the women were crazy. "I'll never fully understand humans," Serino said with a shake of his own head.

"Nor I!" Jordi said in a bit of mock dismay.

Then all five of them laughed with a true sense of joyful gratitude.

"God is wonderful!" Carissa said with tears streaming out of her hysteria.

"Amen!" they all concurred.

SEVEN

Serino looked at Jordi with a knowing gaze. "Didn't Michael tell us they might be difficult to comprehend?" he asked him.

Carissa's ears perked up.

"Serino!" Jordi reprimanded his angelic friend. "That's between us. You know that."

Serino blushed. "I said I was scatterbrained." He seemed flustered with his faux pas.

"Yeah, yeah..." Jordi said. "Try Serino. That's all we can ask."

"OK then!" Serino turned away. He seemed quite embarrassed.

"Sorry friend," Jordi said compassionately. "You've just got to ask the Lord for help with this one."

"I know, Jordi. I know."

"You mean angels have to grow?" Carissa asked.

"Even Jesus had to learn obedience," Serino said sheepishly.

"This is true," Sue said with a somewhat disconcerted look.

"Yeah," Carol said with her own sense of disbelief. "That's what the Bible says."

"And it's true," Jordi said with a genuine sigh.

"I'll bet we never stop learning," Carissa sighed. "You know, that's something I want to do!"

"Me too!" Sue said, making her usual scrunched up face.

Carissa chuckled a little. "I suppose it's not all that funny," she added.

Jordi shook his head. "No, not really."

"So will difficult learning lessons continue?" Carissa said, feeling a little disheartened.

"Way to go Serino," Jordi reprimanded once again. "You really need to ask God's help."

Serino sighed heavily. "We aren't supposed to..."

"You can silence yourself now Serino." Jordi's exasperation was obvious.

"Yeah." Serino stood to leave.

Jordi stood also. "We have somewhere we need to be ladies. Thank you for your company. We'll see you later."

"Thanks guys," Carol said with a look of gentle curiosity.

"I wonder what that was about?" Sue said with amusement written on her face.

"I'm not sure I want to know," Carissa sighed. "And we were having so much fun."

"Well now I'm stirred up!" Sue seemed a bit annoyed.

"Shall I take you to the laughing wall?" Carissa asked, wanting to laugh once again.

"Actually, I haven't seen myself yet!" Sue said with excitement.

"Why don't we all go," Carol said. "I could use a laugh again myself."

As the ladies stood to head for the wall, the Lord Jesus took the stage once again. The three of them sat down. The wall could wait.

This time the Lord seemed less troubled and held a gentle smile on His face. He stood, quietly waiting for the crowded room to notice Him on the stage. It didn't take long.

As the room began to silence, the Lord began to speak. This time His language was angelic. At first Carissa felt disappointed. Then as she began to hear the translation in her mind, the disappointment grew to excited anticipation.

"Now that you've had an opportunity to become familiar with your new home, I have much more to say." The Lord Jesus stopped, clearing His throat before continuing on.

"Before everyone becomes very familiar with heaven's ways, I think you all need to be aware that each of you has a personally designed home to live in here. I'm sure many of you are a little overwhelmed. This is natural. It's also expected.

"Ask for anything and you will receive it. Everything here is replaceable. All you need to do is ask. First of all, ask My Father to take you to your home as soon as you're ready.

"I look forward to meeting each and every one of you. It will take some time. Most of you will be seen in the order I appreciated your love or work on my behalf.

"There are some here who will expect to be first. It won't happen

the way some think it will. I did not and do not hold the same values most humans did and sometimes still do.

"Don't be surprised if you are not first on my list. The way I truly felt about your lives will become more apparent each day.

"As I call you, come to Me. If I do not call you, do not attempt to see Me. It will not go well with those who disregard these instructions. Do I make Myself clear?"

The room broke out in clear agreement.

"Then be blessed as you go your ways. For a time you will have complete freedom to do as you wish. Little will be withheld from you.

"Being in My direct personal presence is the main exception. It will require much to receive permission to have an audience with the King of kings.

"Do not disobey this command. There is a definite higharchy within My Kingdom. This is a grave reality. I am not for sale nor a free gift without going through proper channels. I mean it."

Carissa was a little stunned with the Lord's words. Of course Jesus would be highly sought. That He would be hard to see was a new concept for her. And probably everyone else.

As the Lord walked off the stage, Carissa felt suddenly in need of a quiet place to rest. She was indeed overwhelmed. She imagined many if not most people were.

EIGHT

Carissa could never have imagined her new home. "Wow," she said as she walked toward the huge cabin home that the Lord had given her.

The grounds around her new home were the first thing she noticed. Beautiful natural landscaping surrounded her cabin.

A small lake and waterfall as well as a river with an arched wooden bridge to one side, and a stream to the other, added a picturesque touch to the stunning beauty.

There was an area to the right side of her home that looked almost like a golf course, without the golfers. The area to the left looked like it held many fun hiding places for children.

There was a meadow behind her house that was large enough she could see it from where she stood in the front yard walking toward a set of mahogany double doors.

With a strong sense of excited anticipation, Carissa walked into her own luxurious home. She'd not been able to afford such luxury in all her earthly years.

The place looked like a mansion in a home decorator's magazine. It also looked to be the most magnificent home in the best designer's portfolio.

She gasped at the beauty that would surround her for eternity. "Wow!" she whispered once again.

A huge livingroom graced the front of the home and was quite

stunning. A set of white fabric, cushioned chairs and a couch faced each other over what looked to be a chinchilla rug. The rug, as big as it was, looked tiny over the shiny almost clear teal floor.

A staircase climbed up the back wall. The wall was white with teal and gold pinstriping in swirls. The swirls enhanced the entry into a huge dining room. A large table and ten chairs looked small in the vast size of the room.

A stage and music equipment waited to the left of the seating area, and an apparent dancing area, at least a completely cleared area, waited on the right side of the couch and chairs.

Marble tables stood in varying places, and stones looking pretty much like precious stones garnished the walls completing the pinstripes for a grand effect.

Carissa gasped once again. "I could have some fun parties in this place!" she said softly aware that God had given her exactly what she hadn't known she wanted... until this very moment.

"Thank You, Father!" she said with gentle awe. "Thank You so very much."

NINE

Carissa snuggled up under the gorgeous white bedding that felt as soft and warm as... She couldn't think of words to describe the awesome feeling of comfort that her circumstances warranted.

She thought about her old earthly life. With a shudder, she knew she'd never want any part of her old life again. There was absolutely no comparison. Looking back, she wondered what she'd ever loved about that life. Here everything was so much sweeter.

"Father God," she asked with curiosity, "are You here?"

A soft feeling of peaceful presence enveloped her body and soul.

"Of course I am," she heard a gentle, but clearly audible voice say.

"Can I talk to You like this anytime?" she asked with a strong sense of surprise.

"Yes, daughter, anytime."

"Truly?"

"Yes," He said with soft love.

"Thank You," she said with a peaceful and quiet exhaustion. "I think I need Your comfort as I rest," she said, near sweet and poignant tears. "Thank You for my salvation."

"Oh, Carissa," He said in His own sense of poignant love. "I will comfort you, precious daughter."

A stronger sense of God's powerful presence and the deepest realization of His love filled Carissa with full awareness that she was indeed deeply, sweetly loved.

Carissa couldn't believe it as she slipped off into peaceful sleep. She felt a sweet kind of grateful sleepiness. Her heart wanted to sing herself to sleep. Instead, she decided to sing God a song of love.

Without the slightest knowledge of how to write a song, Carissa gave it a try. Her words were almost child-like.

She sang of the way she felt, honestly. She sang using the most respectful words she could muster. God deserved so much more than this. Her sleepy song was the best she could do at this moment.

It was then she quietly made up her mind. She wanted to dedicate her eternity to loving God in song. She didn't know the first thing about music. She determined right then she wanted to learn this as soon as she could.

"Good night, Father," she said sleepily. It wasn't night. In fact, she hadn't noticed any such thing as darkness in this place.

Then she remembered the words in Revelation that there would be no need of a sun or moon, but God Himself would be their light.

She smiled softly and snuggled down into her comfort once again. Soon she was fast in deep, restful sleep.

TEN

Against a backdrop of crystal blue skies with a spray of varying shades of crimson, yellow and pink, brilliant colors lit up the clouds nearly blinding Carissa to the jagged cliffs stretched out before her.

This was her first morning in heaven. Somehow, she knew it was morning. The marked beauty of the cliffs the day earlier had caught her breath away.

Now it was their slight shadows under the brilliant light, very similar to a sunrise, that took hold of her senses.

Even with the strength of the light emanating from nearly every direction, Carissa could see the waterfall in the shadows rushing toward the lake in hushed tones. Its soft roar seemed to quiet her heart and mind with brand new whispered realities.

Nothing like this place had ever entered Carissa's mind. She'd been raised in the city. While she'd visited the mountains of the old earth, they could never have equaled her experience now.

Pine trees, magnificent and nearly on fire with the light coming from all directions, dotted the horizon and the landscape. Light rays pierced the color-drenched clouds as they filtered through them in varying ways and places. One particularly brilliant set of rays lit up the edge of the cliffs while she watched.

Wild grass stretched over the back of the meadow that graced what seemed to be a huge backyard. White doves lifted off of the meadow and flew over the lake a few hundred yards from her

own perch.

She waited, stunned by the beautiful morning, on the deck of her new home where she watched one glorious event follow another. As the rays of light hit the meadow, it turned the grass and flowers into a billion sparkles. They shone in every direction like stunning gems. Like diamonds, taking turns sparkling throughout the meadow in rapid succession.

"Okay, God," she said teasingly, "now You're showing off!" But she certainly didn't want Him to stop.

Every moment was spectacular splendor. Every second a new kind of beauty emerged. Every hour a brand new and sweet discovery of the power of God's creative abilities.

A warm breeze lifted Carissa's hair and soothingly caressed her cheeks. A Fatherly wonder.

"I love You too," she whispered.

The new life she now lived surprised Carissa. It reminded her of the powerful love she would now know for eternity.

God had been gracious to her. Now she had the opportunity to prepare for a completely new life. One without difficulty. Another testament to God's love for her and hers for Him.

This past day had been so beautiful. Heaven and its eternal purposes were her new paradise bliss.

Over and over again Carissa had dreamt of this moment. It had seemed so long in coming.

Carissa shuddered with the memory of her old life. She had only

been able to cope with her losses because God had softened the blows with His peaceful presence.

Her losses now, the loss of her husband, much of her family, and many of her friends was only beginning to sink in.

Even so, this place was sheer perfection and she knew nothing was out of place. God was entirely in control. Carissa understood it was the best reality she could experience.

Emily, Carissa's best friend, had received Christ about a year ago. Carissa wondered where she might be; what she might be discovering here.

The two of them had believed God would bless their faith once heaven came. Although, the presence of faith was a constant here. Everyone had made it to this place because of faith.

She and Emily had spoken often of what heaven might be like. Now they each knew. For Carissa, reality far surpassed any scenario they'd considered.

"Father, what is it You have planned for me?" Carissa couldn't help but ask.

"So much, my little Care. Today, I want you to rest with Me here; to learn with Me and love Me for awhile."

"Truly?" Carissa felt a little giddy with the thought. She'd wanted to spend so much more time loving God than she had.

"Amazing," she whispered.

"This world will be filled with honor, Carissa, and love. Nothing less," He said, sounding so close to where she sat on the lounge

chair.

"I believe it."

The softness within Carissa's heart was a wonder to experience. She understood. This world would not be built on rebellion and discovering small amounts of faithfulness; but on love and honor. The best kinds of love and honor. Given for the right reasons; the right values. God's values.

"Father, I feel so alone."

"I will bring people into your life, Care. Give it some time. Do you want to help raise some of the little ones who are without parents here?"

"Could I?"

"I would love it, Care."

As the idea filtered into Carissa's heart and mind, excitement began to build. Children! Of course! she thought. There will be millions of little orphans on this side of life. They'll need loving care. And I could love, adore, and become a blessing by adopting such a child. Or two. Or ten.

"That sounds beautiful, Father! Do You think I'd make a good enough mother?"

"Yes, Care, I do."

"Will You prepare me? I mean, I don't know the first thing about parenting. Frank and I couldn't have kids."

"I'll begin your lessons in the next couple of days. "

"There are days here, aren't there?"

"Yes. You'll have to trust Me, Carissa. You'll know when it's time to rest and when it's time to work. Your new soul and body will be ready, able and willing to do My will at every moment."

"That sounds wonderful!" she said with relieved joy.

"Amen," the Lord said with the sound of His own joy.

ELEVEN

After Carissa had spent a good part of the morning checking out her new home and surroundings, she began to wonder what to do about her loneliness. It was an issue she wasn't sure how to solve. She considered the question over a cup of chocolate macadamia nut coffee and a hearty breakfast.

Then the sound of a knock on her door made her jump. In fact, she jumped up so quickly her coffee spashed onto the floor. Before she had time to gasp, the liquid simply vanished!

"Really?" she said in absolute amazement. "I won't even have to clean?"

"No," the Lord said. "All you have to do is ask. Whatever needs to be cleaned will be."

"Cool!" Carissa exclaimed. She felt a wave of new excitement.

As she ran for the door, her excitement caused her to open it a little too strongly.

Carol stood on the other side looking startled. Her eyes were opened a little too wide creating a funny expression of amazement.

"Oh, Carissa!" she exclaimed. "Did you have to answer like that?"

Carissa chuckled. "I'm sorry," she said sheepishly. "I was a little too excited."

"Didn't know you were that desperate for company," Carol said

wryly.

Carissa laughed once again. "No, not really, but almost."

"I know," Carol said with mock exasperation. "Isn't it hard? We live in mansions, gorgeous ones, but absolutely alone!" She laughed as well.

"I swear," Carol continued, "if it weren't for the fact that my children are grown and have families of their own, I'd have room for all of them. I'm afraid they wouldn't want to live with granny anyway."

Carissa stepped aside to allow Carol to enter. Carol gasped with delight when she saw the inside of Carissa's home. "Lucky you!" she said with wonder. "My home is sweet, but I'm in a city of some kind. I'm not complaining, but wow, this is stunning."

The smile on Carissa's face must have said it all. "I think we all had an incredible night. Did you sleep as well as I did?"

"Like a baby."

"Please come on back to my kitchen. Do you still drink coffee?"

"Is it flavored?" The look on Carol's face said she might not like Carissa's choice.

"Chocolate macadamia nut," Carissa said.

"Woo, think I will."

Carol eyed the rest of what she saw with a sense of wonder. She looked like Cinderella viewing the Prince's castle for the very first time.

"I love it, but I don't like living alone either," Carissa confessed.

"I think I want to look up friends and family," Carol said, taking a sip of her coffee, "find a way to meet with them."

"What a great idea!" Carissa said excitedly. "I hadn't thought of that. The Lord asked me about adopting children last night, but I don't want to raise them alone."

"Oh, no. You don't," Carol confirmed.

"It would be fun to try something different. I think I might want to host a party for all of us together. Do you think God would mind?"

"He'd probably be delighted, Carissa. Don't you think?"

"I thought I might want to look up some people today. Like my best friend, Emily," Carissa said, tilting her head to one side as she thought about it all.

Carol rubbed her hands together. "My best friend Sarah is one I'd like to see right away. I'm sure she's just arrived. I'd love to talk to her sometime today."

"Should we invite them all for dinner here?" Carissa said joyously. Her excitement had grown much stronger.

"Oh I think that would be a great idea. I saw your formal dining room on the way in. Sweet!"

Carissa nodded. "Then it's settled. Dinner here at 7:00. Ask whomever you wish and let me know who's showing. You never know, we might need to plan on a huge party."

"I'd love it!" Carol said. "What fun!"

TWELVE

With a house milling with guests Carissa, Carol and Sue had decided on a buffet dinner. Even her elaborate and huge dinning room couldn't accommodate the crowd that developed from their guest list.

Carol had apparently held such parties in her past life on earth. Neither of the other women had. With her expertise, Carol took over the planning and Sue helped in implementing everything.

It was much easier than hiring a last-minute caterer. God gave them all they asked for. Immediately.

Carissa was assigned to meet and greet the guests as they arrived. So many people arrived unannounced Carissa had to laugh. It seemed their party had become the event of the brand new season.

As Carissa continued to welcome new friends and old, the skies behind the evening trees suddenly lit up like wildfire! A chariot, with an entourage of brilliant angels behind the fiery display of grandeur, slipped through the clouds and down into Carissa's massive driveway.

As Carissa watched in amazement, the King of kings dismounted from the chariot and walked toward her front door dressed in full honors.

"Good evening, Carissa," the Lord said, taking hold of her hands briefly.

Carissa held her breath as her Lord waited for her response. "Am I welcome?" He asked as she waited too long to reply.

"Oh, uh, yes, Lord!" she finally said, although faintly. Carissa stepped aside as her Lord entered her home and the crowds caught sight of Him.

There was a sudden rush toward her front entry as He chuckled and began greeting every single person by name.

Carissa caught sight of Carol and the two women exchanged an incredulous gaze. Carol shook her head with a look of disbelief. Carissa shrugged her shoulders and smiled. It seemed they might have been the first to come up with the idea of a party in one of their new homes.

After a couple of hours, the Lord stood and gestured for everyone to grow quiet. It seemed He wanted to speak to them all.

"I'd like to bless this home and our hostesses, Carissa Littleton, Carol Fairing, and Sue Johnson. The ladies have opened Carissa's home and all their hearts to many more than originally intended. Will you all bow your heads and pray with Me now?"

The Lord Jesus cleared His throat before continuing. "Father, I ask the strength of Your blessings, and many of them, upon this home and these hostesses. I ask Your blessing upon every guest here.

"I pray the most beautiful wonders of Your creative abilities for every soul looking for friendship this evening. I ask that many, many others take on themselves this gift of hospitality and that

this will become a restful, joyous time for every person here and all throughout My Kingdom.

"I ask that You prepare leaders and those who can facilitate the needs of those leaders like these women have here tonight.

"I ask for wondrous blessings on My people for developing many, many kinds of friends.

"Thank You, Father, for those who are here tonight. It's the very first time in My new Kingdom someone has sought to meet a need of this kind. And they have met that need successfully and beautifully.

"Thank You, Father, and may You be blessed always, Amen."

As the Lord lifted His head, Carissa saw His emotions had been strong. His eyes were moist with tears.

She, herself, wanted to weep openly.

THIRTEEN

As the evening wound down and Carissa felt the strength of her time and the wonder of what had just happened, she couldn't help but wonder what might come of the evening.

She'd met many people, some apparently strong, close friends of the Lord. Others seemingly stepping into powerful positions in God's Kingdom. It had become more apparent as time progressed that the event had become monumental.

It was as if she'd hosted a meal for every politician in her country on the day of the President's inauguration. Only, this was her Lord Jesus! He was King! And would be forever.

Carissa was stunned to silence. Carol and Sue walked into the living room just as the last guests left.

Extremely important plans had been discussed and some made firm tonight. Carissa was astonished to have witnessed some of what she had.

Carol sat down in one of Carissa's chairs with a strong sigh. Sue stood staring at Carissa silently, with both hands firmly planted on her hips. Sue's expression was wry and incredulous.

"What just happened here?" she asked, literally tongue in cheek.

Carissa shook her head in amazement. "No clue," she whispered.

Carol piped in, "Seems to me some very powerful things happened tonight... right smack in front of us all."

Sue sat down sharply, placed her jaw in her hands, shrugged over, and began laughing.

"I think we just became someone," she said, still shaking her head in disbelief.

Carol looked across the coffee table that separated them and joined in Sue's laughter. "I don't know what just happened, but I think I'll appreciate it later."

"I think I appreciate it now," Carissa said. Then she stopped, looked around at the cleanup that had already been done, and continued... "It seemed the King, the Lord Jesus, appreciated our party all the way through."

Carol sighed. "It sure did," she said.

Sue slapped her legs before rising from her chair. "It would seem our little idea was a huge splash."

'Little idea?" Carissa laughed. "I thought it was little, but few others seemed to agree."

"Including the Lord," Carol confirmed.

"Including the Lord," Carissa and Sue agreed simultaneously.

"Wow." Carol stood to her feet. "What on earth, excuse me, in heaven... could possibly happen next?"

FOURTEEN

Time seemed to stand still for Carissa. She lay awake pondering all that had happened in just a couple of days. It wasn't that she couldn't sleep; more that she didn't want to sleep. She had too much pressing in on her mind.

"Father, may I speak with You for a while?" she asked God.

"Carissa. Of course. What would you like to talk about?"

"So much happened tonight, Sir," Carissa began, "I have questions. If I may."

"Oh yeah, sweetheart. What would you like to know?"

"Why did so many important people come to my home tonight? Why did Your Son come?"

"Why do you think yourself insignificant, Care?"

"I can't be that significant, Lord!"

"Why not?"

"I never have been. Why would I be?"

"Carissa, Jesus was insignificant in His day on the earth, at least at first. Do you think any of my servants were ever important in their own minds?"

"Well, at some point everyone knew who each of them were."

"It usually took beyond their earthly lives, Carissa."

"True." Carissa sighed heavily. She just didn't understand how

she could have been anywhere near as important as she'd been shown to be tonight. Hostess to the most influential people in Christ's Kingdom? This seemed ridiculous to her.

"Carissa, did anyone who was there tonight seem to know they were powerful or influential?"

Carissa had to think about this for a moment. "I guess at first no one knew."

"You'd be right about that, Care. How long did it take for you to catch on that any of them were influential?"

"I guess my first realization came when Jesus arrived," Carissa said with a slight frown.

"It was the first realization for everyone there. My Son was everyone's first clue. Actually, no one truly understood they themselves were important until conversations and plans were well under way. Most thought everyone else in the room was the important one."

"Carissa..." God waited before continuing... "Most people tonight wondered exactly who you were. They thought you must have been direly important to my Son."

"They did?" Carissa sat on this thought for a few seconds.

God remained quiet.

"Am I, Father?"

"You had, and will have, the same opportunities as anyone else."

"Truly?"

"Yes. And, no, Care, I wasn't the One who planned out this event. You, Carol and Sue did the planning."

"You mean, we were important simply because we did this? First?"

"Yes, Carissa." There was a pause as God waited. Probably for Carissa to let the thought sink in.

"Everyone in heaven was wondering how the same need would be met... for themselves. You were the one who stepped out and invited many people. And then smiled as many more showed than you'd thought or planned. No one else in heaven did what you did. Many more will. But you gave them the idea."

"I enjoyed being someone tonight, Father. Can that continue? Or was it just happenstance?"

"Carissa, from this day forward, you'll be known for hosting the first party for the most highly influential people so far.

"First means something to Me. Original thought, original love, original concern for others means more to me than any later improvements can. They'll be building on your loving care, Carissa.

"You will be honored for who you are, and were tonight. It meant something to Me, and enough to My Son that He blessed you over it.

"It meant enough for Me to call many people, leaders I wanted to call, to come to meet each other and lay out plans. Here. Tonight.

"It's like the upper room and My Holy Spirit. They waited. They prayed. They listened. They obeyed. And they'll be known for it

eternally, won't they?"

Carissa sighed. "Yes Sir, they will."

"First, original, foundational... These things mean something to Me."

Carissa waited, letting it all soak in.

"Carissa, you've always been on the spiritual cutting edge."

"I have?"

"You have... Most people follow the example of those who have already been sanctioned. They take the safe route. Once they're aware of what I want, they move in to accomplish what they know to be My will as strongly as they can.

"Some may be better at faith than Paul or Peter. Some may be better rulers or worshippers than David. But they'll never be first. Those with original courage make their way into My heart. I appreciate them."

"Because we were first at heavenly hospitality? We'll be known for it?"

"Yes."

"Wow." After a few silent moments, Carissa began to believe the Lord God. She wanted to weep for her good fortune.

She also began to comprehend, it was more than fortune, more than simply happenstance. She'd shown her courageous colors. Apparently, those colors were pleasing to God.

FIFTEEN

It must have been half way through the next day before Carissa awoke. The day seemed well in swing. As she arose, Carissa felt a tug on her heart to stop and visit Carol in her new city home.

She prayed to be in front of Carol's door and found herself standing near a set of cherry wood doors with a internal entry into what seemed to be similar to a Park Avenue penthouse.

Before knocking on the massive doors, she sauntered down the hallway to gaze out of a huge window facing what seemed to be the Lord's palace.

From a great distance Carissa could see a huge conglomeration of ivory buildings. The white stone was decorated with clear gold, similar to the clear-as-glass gold the Bible spoke of concerning the streets of heaven.

The palace visible from the hall window was made of a mixture of this glassy gold and ivory. It was a stunning sight to say the least.

The light that seemed to emanate from the buildings themselves lit up the entire city with sparkling, golden light.

A huge tree grew near the entrance to the palace and a crystal clear river ran from a huge glassy gold throne to the tree and out from the palace into the surrounding community.

The throne was visible, but definitely inaccessible from where she stood gazing at the beautiful scene.

Angels guarded the throne looking fierce and unapproachable. One seemed similar if not exactly the same angel who had introduced the Lord that first day in heaven.

From what Jordi and Serino had said, Carissa believed this might be the Arch Angel Michael. She couldn't help but wonder if the other angel might be Gabriel.

While Carissa was content, even grateful she lived in the mountains rather than the city, she also felt conflicted about not living in what appeared to be the New Jerusalem.

With a soft knock on Carol's doors, she heard the sound of high heels on marble walking toward the inside of Carol's home.

"Oh! Hi Carissa! I didn't expect to see you so soon. Sorry, don't mean to be rude. Please, come in. What brings you to my humble home before the hour?"

Carissa shrugged at Carol's obvious understatement concerning her home. It was spectacular.

"Humble?" Carissa smiled sheepishly. "As if!"

Carol smiled. "Would you like a tour?" she asked. "It'll have to be quick. We've been summoned."

"To the palace?"

"Yes. I'm surprised you weren't informed. You weren't?"

"I haven't been summoned that I know of," Carissa felt a pang of longing. "Can you say why you were summoned?"

"I was told you'd be there. With Sue, me, Jordi, Serino and my guardian angel, Dawn."

"I hadn't heard anything. How were you summoned?"

"Dawn stopped by to introduce herself and invite me to the meeting. I don't know, maybe Jordi is trying to find you. Or something. I was definitely told you'd be there."

"I wonder what happened?" Carissa made a funny face. Carol giggled.

"Why don't we ask God?" Carol's suggestion sounded like a good idea.

Carissa immediately prayed. "Father?" she said simply.

"My Son is on His way, Care, to invite you personally," the Lord God said. Just then there was a knock on Carol's door.

Carol opened the door sheepishly. "Good morning, Lord," she said. "Please come in, my King."

With her invitation, the Lord Jesus entered, gazing down at the marble floors.

"Ladies," He began and then stopped, looking around Carol's home. "It looks like plans have changed. We'll be meeting here, if that's okay, Carol."

"Of course, Lord!" Carol said with a sense of shock. "Please, my home is your home. Make Yourself comfortable."

Jesus strode across the room and sat down on a soft chair.

"Thank you, Carol. Please ladies, be seated. The others will be here in a few moments."

SIXTEEN

"May I ask what this is about, Lord?" Carissa asked.

"Things went so well last night, Carissa, My Father wanted Me to speak with the three of you and your guardian angels... about taking on a place in My service."

"Wow," Carissa whispered. "That well?"

"Yes, Care," Jesus said and then stopped. There was a long pause as Carissa and Carol soaked in what the Lord had said.

"Many of the men and women who were there last night asked My Father the same question. They wanted your assistance in helping them implement the plans made last night.

"You three worked well together. They'll require the same kinds of assistance in the future. Many of them were called by My Father to leadership positions last night. You're being asked as well. We need hospitality leaders. Are you both open to such a thing?"

Carol eagerly nodded and Carissa silently shook her head in disbelief and then realized she was saying no in effect.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Lord," she quickly explained. "I'd love to help. I'm just having a hard time understanding why you'd choose me?"

Jesus chuckled. "Of course, Carissa, what good are you?" He smiled brightly. He was apparently teasing Carissa.

She smiled and shook her head once again. "My thoughts

exactly."

Jesus shook His own head in a sense of wonder. "You really aren't all that bad, you know," He said, still smiling.

"How can we help, Lord?" Carol asked.

"We probably should wait til the others arrive to discuss details," He said with a soft smile.

"Of course," Carol confirmed. "You're absolutely right."

Just then a small crowd gathered rather loudly just outside Carol's doors. The sound of Serino's voice speaking in blusturous tones fell on their ears. Apparently, he was offering Michael some suggestions.

"May I?" Jesus asked Carol.

"Yes, Sir," Carol capitulated.

Jesus stood to answer Carol's door.

As He opened the doors to the crowd, while Serino was in mid bluster, Serino blushed crimson and dropped his sentence, going completely silent.

Carol hid her face, apparently in embarrassment. So did Serino. Serino stepped to the back of the crowd. "Excuse me, Lord," he said, offering his first show of true humility.

Michael looked at the Lord in a soft sense of exasperation. "Thank You," he said to Jesus.

Jordi looked embarrassed to know Serino. Jesus held out his hand and introduced Himself to both angels as well as Dawn.

Dawn was a beautiful female-looking angel with full, dark hair and a gentle smile.

She nodded an acknowledgement to the Lord and stepped inside first. Apparently, from what Carissa could see, angels also had a gentlemanly sense.

"Well," Jesus said, stepping aside to let the others in, "looks like I'm in charge."

Michael chuckled.

The other high level angel smiled sheepishly. "It would seem so, Your Majesty."

"Ep. Probably gonna be true for eternity." Jesus shook His head as if He just couldn't believe it Himself.

"So, why don't we all pull up chairs and get comfortable," Jesus said. "We have much to discuss."

SEVENTEEN

As the crowd of people and angels pulled up chairs that hadn't been there until that moment, and sat at a long, high table that simply appeared, it seemed most were aware of what needed to happen when.

Carissa, Carol, and Sue caught on quickly enough. Serino and Jordi kept a low profile as the Lord Jesus led the meeting informally.

It seemed Carissa would be trained and responsible for connecting people within the Kingdom.

Carol would lead others in preparing their homes for leadership meetings and get-togethers among very high level people as well as angels in varying positions within the Kingdom of God.

Sue would assist Carol every way she could. This apparently included helping her interview and choose additional hospitality leaders.

Carissa was astonished with the level of responsibility each of them would have.

Jordi, Serino and Dawn would assist in heavenly ways. They'd each be responsible for connecting the women with angels at every level. This included Michael and Gabriel, who was indeed the second high level angel.

Everyone would answer, in order, to the Lord Himself. Michael and Gabriel would be His direct contacts. Other than this,

apparently, they'd all have nearly open access to the Lord.

There were some exceptions, of course, but an open invitation was extended to them should they have any trouble with any aspect of service. They'd apparently have a relatively open-ended invitation to speak directly with the Lord Jesus.

The only real restriction would be if Gabriel or Michael told them it was not to happen. Of course, none of them wanted to take advantage of the Lord in this way. None of them wanted to lose or abuse such a privilege.

As Carissa became more acquainted with Christ Jesus, she was astonished at His humanity and sense of humor.

Jesus seemed a regular man. In general, he was less unapproachable and yet His was also a very firm 'no.' His mandates would be completed. Period.

No one, not Serino, not Carissa, no one at all wanted to step out of line with Him. Serving Jesus was such an honourous blessing and privilege, no one even considered giving less than their best.

As plans were set in place, Carissa's excitement grew nearly tangible. Carol beamed with joy. Sue's sense of humor became her ticket with Christ. They batted humorous banter back and forth until everyone was in stitches.

Even Michael and Serino began to seem good friends. Jesus seemed to help everyone feel successful and accepted.

It seemed even outcasts, as usual, were given great honor with Him.

EIGHTEEN

As plans grew firm and then solid, Jesus seemed pleased with the ideas presented. His ideas added a depth no one else had considered.

It was definite His heart was to facilitate community and loving acceptance toward everyone. It also became apparent His Kingdom would be incredibly beautiful.

Carol had sat taking notes quietly the entire time. When she added anything at all to the conversation, it was substantial and very enlightening.

Sue's sense of helpfulness added a dimension of incredible wisdom and made the process of planning much easier. It seemed everyone would indeed have an appropriate place to fill.

Jesus took notes as well. He was concerned that certain people be included in leadership. He kept having aha moments and scribbling down names and notes.

By the end of the session, everyone knew what they needed to do next. A meeting was planned for two days later to include the other leaders who'd attended the party and many more.

Carissa's idea to host the meeting at her home with another dinner was voted down. It seemed she'd be required as more than a hostess. Such would draw her away from what was truly needed.

Excitement began to grow for the entire group. The Lord seemed

more excited than anyone else. His face grew more joyful than Carissa had seen before.

With full plans so far in place, the group stood to disband with joyful chatter.

Serino, it seemed, had actually had more than one opportunity to give Michael, and Gabriel, very good and appreciated suggestions. His face shone with soft joy and a far more humble demeanor.

Jordi had made his own quiet splash. He and Gabriel had exchanged a strong number of ideas. Both for themselves and each other. It seemed Gabriel appreciated Jordi's ideas, and definitely vice versa.

Carissa's head swam with all that had been presented. She was very grateful for Carol's notes. Copies were distributed before the end of the meeting. They were apparently far more helpful than she'd thought they'd be.

The plan for the next meeting was Carol's next assignment. She and Sue were to find another set of hosts or hostesses to accommodate the group.

Their next meeting, it seemed, might grow to several hundred people and angels.

This, Carissa knew, was well over her own head, but not Carol's. With Sue aiding in Carol's assignment, Carissa knew all would be well.

NINETEEN

Carol and Sue indeed had made the meeting into a joyously easy endeavor.

A man and his family of older children had been asked to host the party. It all looked spectacular and very culturally different than Carissa was used to.

As people arrived, they were all dressed as they would have been for their specific culture and time. Some were dressed in gowns from the 1800s, some in a sarong.

Men were sometimes dressed in turbans and/or robes from biblical times. Other men arrived in uniforms and women in Roman era dresses. No one seemed to come from the same time much less the same language or culture.

It was a delightful mixture of people from very differing backgrounds. Yet each one of them greeted each of the others with very real brotherly or sisterly love.

Language was translated automatically in every person's own tongue within their minds. Not a soul was left in the dark.

As the party grew in number, it seemed every era and culture was represented by someone.

It seemed the Father had chosen both men and women to take on equal positions and responsibilities. It also appeared that Paul's statement of there being no difference between various types of people would become God's reality.

Jesus Himself had surprised many with His nationality and coloring as well as His love for all types of people. He had particularly surprised some with His acceptance and love for every kind of sinner under the sun.

Carissa understood, everyone had been in need of God's grace, mercy, love and forgiveness. Those who did not catch this at this point were bound to struggle more than the average soul.

The Kingdom of Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Father would apparently become one of strong love and acceptance for everyone who'd made it into His Kingdom.

Those who would become outcasts, and still loved and accepted, were those who thought themselves better than others.

These ideals, Carissa appreciated. It was a direct reversal of the way things had been on the old earth.

TWENTY

After several hours of great fun with so many people, Carissa felt a peaceful exhaustion sweep over her soul that almost seemed uncomfortable.

"Father," she said, and then faltered, searching for words. "I'm so tired."

Carissa was puzzled by her sudden lack of energy. "I don't think I'm physically tired, Sir. I think I'm desperately in need of You... I guess I'm emotionally drained."

She turned over under her blankets and felt her strong, soft need for God in its fullness. "Lord, come meet me here. Help me adjust to all this. I mean, it's amazing. Don't get me wrong. It's just... I need You."

"Hi Carissa," God said softly. "How's my little one? Tell me about it."

Carissa chuckled softly and then burst into tears. "I don't know what's wrong with me, Father!" She let loose and allowed her true emotions to surface.

"Could it be that you're discovering your love for me has been returned, Carissa? You know, sweetheart, I've appreciated the strength of your love for many years now."

"That would be it," Carissa said wryly. "Touché."

A new round of tears flowed heavily. Carissa picked up one of the extra pillows on her bed and hugged it to herself, rocking just

a little in a gentle sense of insecurity.

God's presence grew stronger. Carissa felt His powerful love envelope her.

"You matter to Me, Care," He said. "Did you think that because people on the old earth didn't see your love for Me, I didn't?"

Carissa couldn't respond. Her tears prevented her words.

"I saw your precious love, Carissa. It was as important to Me as My love is for you now."

There was a sound of God's heavy sigh. "So few people focused on Me, Care. Some loved Me, but most people focused on what My Son had done for them. They seemed to forget Me in the process." The sound of God's nearly silent tears swept over Carissa's heart.

"I love Jesus," He said sadly. "What He did for Me and for them was and is monumental." God paused as the sound of His tears continued.

"Carissa, you were one of so few who caught on and cared about who I, as God your Father, was and wanted to be for all My people.

"I loved them too. My sacrifice was also grave. I wanted... their love also. Most people never even considered loving Me."

Carissa hugged her pillow the way she wished she could hug God. His presence grew even stronger.

"Thank you, Carissa," God said. "It's My great pleasure to give you back the love and honor you once gave, and continue still to

give, Me.

"I adore My children. Your love and trust for Me has been huge, Care. They're appreciated."

With a gentleness that surpassed Carissa's comprehension, God's Spirit wrapped around her soul.

Carissa understood. It was the only way God could return her loving hug.

"Wow," she whispered into the air that seemed permeated with God's presence. "I love You, Father. Very much."

TWENTY ONE

With a powerful sense of new confidence combined with a recognition that others were just as important to God as He'd said she was the "night" before, Carissa arose to the sound of birdsong and splashing water.

"What in the world?" she asked with a sense of amusement. She gazed out the sliding glass doors behind her bed and giggled. A huge flock of sparrows frolicked in a puddle that had formed just outside her open glass doors.

It was funny until Carissa caught the memory of Christ's words and the hymn that had come from them. "His eye is on the sparrow."

She caught it. God's call at this moment was for her to consider the powerful love He held for "the least of these."

Carissa had been so strongly rejected nearly all of her life, she understood the way many if not most people felt.

The idea of being small in God's Kingdom gave her physical heart a modicum of distress.

She was apparently less small than she'd once considered herself. Others, however, would be thinking little of themselves right now. This made her want to do something about the thought.

"Father God?" she asked as she descended her stairs. "What would You like me to do this morning? Is this today's theme?"

"Yes," she heard Him say. But He didn't say anything more.

"Hmm," she said, pondering the thought. "Is this an important part of my duties?" she asked.

"Um hmm." Again, there was nothing more said.

After thinking it through for a moment, Carissa chuckled. "You're mysterious this morning," she said with a smile.

"Um hmm," God said with a sense of His own playfulness.

"Come on!" she said, turning in the direction of the sound of His voice and placing her hands on her hips. "What's up, Lord?"

"We'll talk about it all day," the Lord God said. "Be nice!"

Carissa laughed strongly. She enjoyed God's playfulness.

"Okay, fine!" she teased in like manner.

Just as a soft knock sounded on her front door, the Lord God chuckled. "It has something to do with our conversation before the first party."

"What?" Carissa asked before she ventured toward the door and opened to find a small child standing awaiting an answer.

The child stood alone at her door, but Jesus stood at a distance apparently seeing the child off. He waited, then waved at Carissa and disappeared.

"Hi," Carissa said, stooping down to the girl's eye level. "How may I help you?"

"Jesus told me to talk to the woman at this house," the girl muttered in barely audible tones. "Are you my new mama?"

Her little face looked slightly fearful, almost certain of rejection. Carissa's heart went out to the child. She couldn't have been older than four or five.

"Come on in child," Carissa said gently, she attempted a smile through her quivering lips. She wanted to burst into tears yet again. "Why don't we ask God about it together?"

The girl's lips quivered herself. "I don't have a mama or papa," she said. Once again her words were barely audible.

"We'll ask your Papa God. You never know, little one, I just might be your new mama. We have to ask God first, though. His hopes matter. He has first say in both our lives."

Carissa walked into her living room with the sound of her heels clicking against the clear, teal flooring. It sounded as if her home was far too empty. Again, she wanted to cry.

The girl gazed around the room with wide, incredulous eyes. "You must be a princess," she said very softly.

"You must be a princess too," Carissa said. She looked at the girl; her heart filled with compassion.

The child smiled softly and shrugged. "I guess so," she said a little more strongly. Then she smiled very widely and skipped over the flooring to sit on Carissa's soft "chinchilla" rug.

"I like your house," the girl said with a firm nod of her head. "Maybe Papa God will let me stay here for awhile. Maybe?"

Carissa smiled. At this point, she believed it.

TWENTY TWO

Father, is this Your will, Sir? Carissa asked internally. She felt a strong hope that it was God's plan.

Carissa wasn't sure she was in the least ready for parenthood, but her heart hoped God would ready her quickly, if not on the fly, for the sake of this precious little girl.

"If it is, help me be the kind of mom she needs," she whispered softly.

Carissa, God spoke in her mind, if you can do what you're doing with people in general right now, why can't you do this? If I help you, of course.

She's precious, Father. I don't want to become an inept problem for her.

The same question still applies, Care. If I can trust you with huge numbers of people, why wouldn't I trust you with this very precious child?

I feel so fearful of failing, Lord. Carissa paused to consider God's words. What's her name, Father?

Ask her, Care.

Carissa stopped. She watched the child stroke the soft "fur" of her rug.

The girl looked up at her and smiled. "Soff," she said with an even bigger smile.

"Yes," Carissa responded. "Little one, may I ask your name?"

"My name?" she questioned as if Carissa might be asking someone else.

"Yes, darling, what is your name? Are you a real princess?" Carissa asked the child in a somewhat child-like tone.

The girl shrugged, looking sad. "I don't know." Then she stroked the rug's softness again. She seemed entirely taken by the rug.

"Jesus told me my real mom sent me to heaven cause she wanted me to live here with the angels and Him."

Abortion? Carissa asked within her heart. She didn't dare speak the word aloud.

The girl continued. "He said my mom wanted me to be here with Him and play on the light slides while the angels took care of me til I could have a new mom."

Carissa's heart melted. "Do you have your very own name, princess?" she asked once again.

The girl smiled. "I guess I'm Princess Arelia."

"Thank you, Princess Arelia," Carissa said. She thought maybe she understood a little too much. At least more than the child should hear at this, and possibly any, point.

"Well, I'm glad the Lord brought you here to my home. Would you like to ask Papa God if it's okay for you to stay here in my home for awhile?"

Arelia looked up at her with innocent hope. She nodded her head eagerly, but still a little tentatively. "Maybe it would be okay?"

"Let's ask, Arelia. Let's talk to Papa God together."

Arelia nodded and politely lowered her gaze and folded her hands to pray.

"Thank you, darling," Carissa said. "I'll start, and you can go next. Okay?"

"Kay," Arelia said with an eager nod.

"Father God," Carissa began, "please come speak with Arelia and I together, Sir." Carissa stopped to watch the girl's response. She merely kept her head lowered substantially and waited for Carissa to continue.

"Father, is it as awesome as I think it is for Arelia to live here in my home?"

God's voice came softly. "Arelia?" He asked. "Would you like Miss Carissa to be your new mama?"

Arelia shrugged her shoulders without lifting her gaze. "Yeah?" she said tentatively. "Please God?"

Carissa's heart jumped. "I'd like to have her stay with me here, Father," Carissa said.

Arelia gazed up at Carissa with a stricken look. "Really?" she asked sadly.

Carissa nodded her head. She couldn't say a word. When she found her voice, Carissa said to the Lord, "Please, Father?"

God's voice seemed stricken as well. "It would be My great delight darlings," He said. "Carissa, I give your new daughter into your care. Take care of her as you would my own child. For that's

who she is."

"Wow," Carissa whispered.

Areliia ran into her arms. "Thank You, Papa God," she said softly. And then she kissed Carissa's cheek. "Mama?" she asked.

"Yeah," Carissa said. Her own voice was barely audible.

"Thank you for being my new mama."

Carissa couldn't hold back her tears as she hugged her new little girl. She knew, she was as ready as she needed to be--with God's help of course.

TWENTY THREE

The small meal Carissa prepared for her new tiny family brought with it a set of playful games. Carissa understood she was the mom in their situation. She didn't want that to prevent having some fun, even so.

Home rules and company rules, she figured, probably should be a little different from each other. Not that she knew anything about motherhood. She was well aware that she didn't.

As an adult, Carissa started to see the lessons and correlations in both new sets of her responsibilities. Her service to Jesus and His being somewhat like family to her in that service, gave her an idea of how she wanted to learn both her roles.

Jesus was highly approachable, very 'normal,' and easy to talk to while also being Lord and King.

Dinner time, she decided, would be game time in some ways. She figured it would be far more fun for both of them this way.

As she and Arelia sat down to eat, the child seemed far too polite and proper. Carissa decided mealtime could be both time to teach manners and have some fun.

'AreliA," she ventured, "in our home, we play Princess and Mama Princess while we eat. Doesn't that sound like fun?"

AreliA's eyes looked at her with a sense of adventurous amazement. "Do we get to eat like princesses?" she asked with a gigantic smile.

"Exactly!" Carissa said. Then she posed in overstated politeness and held her nose in the air as if she were being snooty.

"I'm Princess Carissa," she said, pinching her nose to make her voice sound odd.

Arelia giggled. "Me too," she said pinching her nose with both hands. "That's hard, Mama Princess," she said still trying out her new voice.

Carissa giggled. "Yahz!" she said pinching her nose so that Arelia could see how she was doing it. "I know. We Prrrrincesses must be prrrproper..."

Then Carissa took away her pinch and said very informally, "We just gotta learn how!"

Arelia giggled with glee.

"Prrrrrim...cesses" she said and then looked crossly at her plate with her hands on her hips, "We Prrrrincesses muss be prrrproper."

The two girls giggled knowingly at each other.

"Can we wait to play til after we eat, Mama?" Arelia said in little girl style. "My dinner's getting cold."

Carissa smiled. "Of courrrse," she said. Then she cocked her head to one side and said in normal tones, "tomorrow!"

The ladies concentrated on their meal in intermittent joyful chatter. It seemed her little daughter had a good head on her shoulders.

During bouts of Arelia's silence, Carissa considered the days

ahead. Her life could no longer be about herself. She must adjust to the needs of an instant family. She shook her head with this particular responsibility.

"Ouch," she whispered to herself.

Arelia looked concerned. "Mama got a boo boo?" she asked with a sorrowful look.

"Watch!" Carissa said, and then she kissed her index finger. "See? No more boo boo. Kisses always make it better."

Arelia yawned heavily. It looked to Carissa like she needed to prepare one of her extra rooms for her new daughter.

"Excuse me, darling," she said, "I've got to find a place for you to sleep tonight."

"I'm not tired," Arelia said through another yawn.

"I know," Carissa responded, "but you will be later."

TWENTY FOUR

As Carissa made her way upstairs, Arelia played with some toys she'd prayed the Lord would provide specifically for Arelia.

When Carissa reached the halfway point on her staircase, the Lord filled her with His presence to the point she could barely move.

"Yes Sir?" Carissa whispered.

"Great job, Care. Arelia feels very welcome. She's going to want to sleep in your room tonight. I want you to say, no. Firmly."

"Okay..."

"She's not quite old enough to understand why, so I want you to start building on the word, 'privacy.' Tell her you need privacy.

"When she asks, explain that all mamas need privacy. So, you're sorry, but no she can't sleep in your room."

Carissa nodded her head. "Thank You, Lord," she said sincerely. "These things are so new to me."

"You're catching on well, Care. Very well. I'm happy. Arelia is too."

Carissa sighed with relief. "Good!" she said with a tone of her true exasperation and stress. "This is a little nerve racking."

"Yes," the Lord said. "Tell me about it."

There was a pause as Carissa thought it through with a sense of amusement. "Oh man," she said as she caught on, "by the

billions!"

"Yep! You got it."

"Ahhhhh!" Carissa complained. "That's gotta hurt!"

The Lord God chuckled. "Nah! Not at all!"

Carissa shook her head in wonder. "Billions of rebellious children!" she said. It suddenly made sense. "No wonder You grew frustrated with mankind sometimes!"

"Um hmm."

When Carissa opened the door to the child's bedroom closest to hers, it was warmly put together already.

A tiny bed with rails on each side awaited Arelia with a nightlight that cast a warm and pretty pattern on the wall.

A large, soft, stuffed puppy with a red tongue sticking out of its mouth awaited Arelia on the inside of the little bed. It was lying on Arelia's pillow, half covered by her blankets. In fact, its paws were holding onto the outside of the covers as if it were snuggled in bed awaiting Arelia's cuddling arms.

"Now when Arelia crawls in bed," God continued, "kiss both her and 'Ruffles the Puppyhearted' goodnight," He said with the sound of His amusement.

Carissa laughed. "Ruffles the Puppyhearted," she repeated with amusement of her own.

"Did you hear Me, daughter?" He asked her.

"Yeah," she giggled, wiping away funny tears. "Kiss them both

goodnight.

TWENTY FIVE

By the time Arelia arose from her sleep, Carissa was very wide awake. Arelia apparently moved slowly in the mornings, at least today.

Rubbing her eyes, Arelia walked into the kitchen carrying Ruffles. The stuffed Puppyhearted animal looked well broken in. Arelia's arm carried the puppy by the neck.

This created a hilarious picture of the dog sticking its tongue out over her arm. Carissa couldn't help but chuckle under her breath. "Good morning Ruffles! Good morning my little Arelia!" she said sweetly.

Arelia frowned and rubbed her eyes. Her squeeze on Ruffles' neck became acute. And very cute.

Carissa smiled at her child. "Not a morning girl, I see," she whispered to herself.

Arelia made a grumble and sat down in one of the kitchen chairs with a solid sound of complaint.

"Papa Jesus is coming today," Arelia said with absolute certainty.

"He is?" Carissa asked. "Why do you think so?"

"Just cause," Arelia protested the question, and most likely Carissa's annoying morning joyfulness, with another grumble.

"Jesus talks to kids, you know," Arelia said with a sense of defensiveness.

"He does?" Carissa probably sounded a little too genuinely surprised.

"Yeah!" Arelia said more sharply than Carissa appreciated.

"Be respectful, please," Carissa reprimanded, but just a little.

Arelia looked reticent. "Okay, mama," she whispered.

"You know how, Arelia, you're very good at being polite."

Arelia giggled. "Yahz," she said, posing in overstated fashion and pinching her nose, which she'd held high.

Carissa chuckled. Then she gave both Ruffles and Arelia a good hug and a sound kiss.

"Thank you, Prrrrincess Arelia," she said. "Shall we call Ruffles our Prince?"

Arelia giggled. "Only I think he should be called Prrrince Rrrruff!" she said with another giggle.

Carissa giggled as well. "Prrrince Rrrruff, the Puppyhearted!" she said, unable to hold back her laughter.

Arelia laughed very strongly. "Funny," she said.

Then Arelia gave Ruff the hug to beat all hugs. "I love you, Prince Ruffles," she said, smoothing his fur out and fixing his slightly crooked head.

Carissa wiped tears of laughter away before asking Arelia more about Jesus.

"Do you really think King Jesus will visit today?" she asked her daughter.

"Uh huh," Arelia nodded firmly. "Cause He said so!"

"When?" Carissa asked. She was honestly very curious.

"In my dream," she said with another firm nod. She adjusted her position on the chair and then got down, pulling the chair closer to the table. When she climbed back up into the chair, it was perfectly set for her little self.

"Good job!" Carissa said.

Arelia looked at her puzzled. "What?" she asked with mild irritation.

"Oh, you just took care of that chair like a very big girl," Carissa said with her own firm nod. She went back to cooking breakfast.

"Well, if I didn't," Arelia said with a gleam, "Puppyhearted Prince Ruffles wasn't gonna do it."

Carissa almost lost her sip of coffee. "You're funny," Little One," she said turning away with her smile.

"Yep," Arelia said, with yet another firm nod of her head. "It's fun to be funny."

TWENTY SIX

Within a matter of minutes following breakfast, the sound of a strong knock came to Carissa's door. Then, the sound of a door knocker, then the sound of a doorbell.

Carissa smiled knowing exactly who it was. She didn't have a bell or a set of doorknockers.

When Carissa opened the door, she wasn't surprised to see Jesus standing outside, making funny faces.

'May I speak with Prrrrincesses Carissa and Arelia?' He asked in snooty tones.

Carissa nearly doubled over with laughter. It was Arelia who behaved more like a lady.

"Told you, Mama," Arelia said firmly. "Even kids are important to Jesus."

Carissa stood upright and sobered a little. The Lord walked into her home with an amused aire.

"How's it going, you two?" He asked.

"Wonderful!" Carissa said with joy.

"Me n Ruff n Mama are haven breakfass!" Arelia announced.

"Thank You, Jesus," Arelia said sincerely.

"You wanna tell your Mama why I'm here, Arelia?" He asked her.

"Cause," Arelia pointed to her teeth. "Ah, ah, cause... Um... That's

right! Cause You're gonna have a big birthday party for, uh, uh..." Arelia toyed with Ruffles' collar. "I forgot!" she finished, and that was that.

Arelia picked up Ruffles and headed toward her room. "I'm gonna go play," she said. "Bye, Jesus!"

Jesus chuckled. "Kids are so cute!" He said.

"Amen," Carissa said soberly. "Thank You, Lord. She's wonderful."

"She really needed you, Carissa."

She wiped away a stray strand of hair and nodded in agreement. "Yes," she said simply.

Jesus looked at her sideways. "You too, huh?"

"Yes, Lord," she nodded. "Definitely."

Carissa waited for a silent moment. "A birthday party? Whose birthday?" she asked.

"Mine," He said.

"Ohh!" Carissa said sheepishly. "I forgot. No one I knew had a clue when Your real birthday was."

"No," Jesus said, looking at Carissa as if concerned.

"What is it, Lord?" she asked. She stopped what she was doing and turned to face her King with profound soberness.

Many, many, many! people will be there, Care," He said. "I'd like you there as a leader in training."

Jesus paused and sighed a little before continuing. "My best friends will be there. My Father's favorites as well."

Carissa turned, facing Him fully. "Wow," she said softly.

"Are you up to it?" He asked, helping Himself to a bite of the food she was in the process of putting away.

Carissa nodded very soberly. "Who'll be training me?" she asked. She knew Jesus would be too busy for the job.

"My Father," He said, turning away a little, "and my mother."

TWENTY SEVEN

The huge crowd that assembled in the much larger ballroom within the Lord's palace blew Carissa away. There were literally at least thousands of people invited to His birthday celebration.

Carissa hadn't been introduced to a single soul. She was catching on to the magnitude of what she needed to learn and why.

Carol had offered to care for Arelia in her home. This was both very convenient and greatly appreciated.

The discomfort of not knowing who was who among such an important group of Christ's personal friends was astonishing. Carissa wanted to shrink from this task and responsibility altogether. It seemed far over her capabilities.

Carissa, God said to her internally, relax. Just get to know someone else who seems uncomfortable.

Carissa gazed around the room. A woman dressed like old era royalty leaned against the wall on one side of the ballroom. She seemed very uncomfortable.

As Carissa made her way toward the woman, she looked over at Carissa with a modicum of fear written on her face.

With a smile, Carissa made an attempt to introduce herself. "Hi," she said.

The woman turned toward her seeming even more uncomfortable.

"My name's Carissa," she said softening her tone so the woman wouldn't run, or turn, away from her.

"Abigail," she said, seeming to force a smile.

"David's Abigail?" Carissa asked. The woman rolled her eyes and looked uncomfortable beyond words.

"I'm sorry," Carissa said. "I'm new here. I don't know a soul."

Abigail smiled more fully. "Me too," she said with a sheepish expression. "It's not much fun when you don't know anyone."

"Well, I'm not much of one to know," Carissa said with her own sheepishness.

"Yeah," Abigail shrugged. "I'm not either. Everyone knows David, but all I am is his reject."

Abigail motioned her head toward a man and woman who laughed and talked to a crowd of people together very comfortably.

"Bathsheba..." she said, "and David." Her voice was one of chagrin.

"Ouch," Carissa winced.

"You said it," Abigail confessed with a tiny bit less discomfort.

"Would you like to get something to drink?" Carissa asked.

Abigail smiled teasingly. "That depends on what it is," she chuckled. "Could use a little wine about now. Unfortunately, I couldn't trust what I might say."

Carissa chuckled again. "I'm not sure what I'd want to say either,"

she confessed.

"Don't even consider saying it, Carissa," Abigail warned. "Believe me, it isn't always worth the words. They can come back to bite you."

Carissa drew air in between clenched teeth. "You must have learned that the hard way."

"You got it."

Carissa walked with Abigail toward the refreshment tables. "Why don't we settle for punch?" she said making a wary face.

Abigail laughed. "Thank you," she said earnestly. "How are you acquainted with His Majesty?"

"Just getting to know Him, actually, at least face to face," she confessed.

Carissa then took a sip of the raspberry punch she'd placed in a silver chalice. She'd ladled the punch from one of many incredibly gorgeous silver bowls.

"Watch yourself," Abigail warned. "Kings can be harder to deal with than they sometimes seem. I mean, it's not that the Lord Jesus is hard to get to know. It's more that everyone else wants to know Him better."

"Do you think people will be that way in heaven?" Carissa asked, startled.

"Not as much, I'm sure. Actually, for His sake, I hope not at all!"

Carissa wondered. She knew from the slipped words Jordi and Serino had said after Michael's speech to the angels that first

day, it might be possible.

People, angels, and even Jesus, apparently, still had to learn things from within heaven. Sin wouldn't be an issue, but innocent lack of understanding might.

"Look!" Abigail pointed her drink toward a man dressed in pure white. "That's Elijah," she said.

Carissa chuckled and shook her head in wonder. "I expected a very old man," she said.

"No one's aged here," Abigail said. "Not even me."

"They're just internally wise and experienced?" Carissa asked.

"Well, if you stop and consider it," Abigail said, "I'm thousands of years old."

Carissa accidentally spit a little juice out. It soaked into her gown and then disappeared.

Abigail laughed heartily. "Way to go!" she said, still laughing.

Abigail then grew very sober and looked away.

"What is it?" Carissa asked.

Abigail shook her head quietly. "Mary, Jesus' mother," she whispered. "She's headed this way. She's sweet, but I'm more than a little salty. I'll catch you later."

TWENTY EIGHT

Carissa wasn't sure what to do with what had just happened. She'd enjoyed her time with Abigail, but wondered if everyone would be exactly who they'd always been. If so, Carissa was grateful. She was enjoying the differences she'd encountered so far.

"Having a good time, dear?" Jesus' mother asked Carissa, who was once again struck by the level of company she was beginning to keep.

She'd known this would be the case, but apparently hadn't truly let it sink in til now. She'd felt more 'normal' with the Lord than she did among His friends and physical family.

Carissa shook her head at the thought. Mary looked concerned. "No?" she asked Carissa, apparently thinking Carissa had meant she'd not enjoyed herself at all.

Carissa blushed. "I'm sorry, she chuckled nervously. "I was thinking of something else."

Mary smiled. "I won't have much time tonight," she said to Carissa. "But my Son wanted me to see if there was anything you'd need. I'll check back with you from time to time."

Carissa smiled warily. "I'll be alright, Mrs... Mary."

Carissa blushed with her many faux pas.

"Let me know, child, if there's anything I can do for you."

Carissa thought seriously about asking Mary to introduce her to some people. Then she backed down from her thought and said simply, "Thank you."

Jesus looked across the room and caught Carissa's eye. He smiled briefly and went back to His conversation.

Father? Carissa asked internally. I think I just want to go home.

You'll fail at your job, Carissa, if you do, God said within her heart.

Well, what is it I'm supposed to learn here? she asked, frustrated.

Be respectful, please, God said, using her earlier words to Arelia.

Carissa sighed. You're right, she said sheepishly. I'm sorry, Lord.

Care, may I introduce you to your new best friend?

Please! Carissa pleaded. She felt near tears and a complete failure. She'd thought this party would be wonderful fun. So far, she'd been, or at least felt, very unsuccessful.

TWENTY NINE

Making her way to where God seemed to say Jesus' mother was, Carissa wondered where God was leading her and how and to whom He planned to introduce her.

As she rounded a back corner in the ballroom, she noted a smaller, much more private room. The room, it seemed was filled with Jesus' family.

Mary stood speaking with a group within the small crowd. There were many Middle Eastern people gathered in the room.

They spoke in the same language Jesus had used when He'd first addressed His people. Again, Carissa was certain their language was Hebrew.

While they laughed and spoke animatedly, she didn't hear a translated word. Apparently, those within this room were given complete privacy.

The Father urged her to enter. Carissa couldn't bring herself to do it. It was then Mary noticed her standing in the doorway.

"Child!" she exclaimed with a huge smile. "Please, come in!"

Carissa felt a wave of embarrassment. God urged her to listen and join the small crowd.

"Well?" Mary asked. "You've been invited."

Carissa blushed. This was very much beyond her comfort zone.

Mary chuckled. "Let me introduce you, Carissa," she said.

As Carissa tentatively joined the group, Mary urged her forward. "Come on, sweetheart," she said with another chuckle.

Amusement was written on her features. "We don't bite."

A man in the group smiled in an amused way and said, "No, we leave that to Jesus."

A few people laughed lightly. "He's been known to do it," another man said.

A woman of particular beauty, very dark complexion, and gorgeous curly, black hair, spoke up softly. "You should have seen Him bite the Pharisees," she said behind her drink of something very unusual looking.

Carissa's discomfort mounted. "I'm not sure why I'm here," she said with near reticence.

Mary spoke up next. "It doesn't matter why, Carissa," she said. "It seems maybe God wants you to join us."

The woman with the dark hair shook her head. "Mom," she said to Mary, "maybe she doesn't want to come in."

Carissa shook her head also, "Oh no," she said softly. "It's not that don't want to join you." Then she sighed. "I'm afraid I do bite."

The whole group laughed. Mary held her fingers to the bridge of her nose as she quietly laughed. "Then you'll get along fine with us," she said through her nearly silent chuckles.

Mary's daughter shook her head as if in disbelief. She seemed very embarrassed by her family.

Carissa began to move across the room. Mary met her halfway. She took Carissa by the arm and led her into the group.

They each took turns shaking her hand and introducing themselves and each other. One of the men stopped and kissed her on both cheeks briefly saying, "I don't care that much for Western rules... That much," he blushed. "Name's James... in English."

When Carissa came to Mary's daughter, the girl flinched and waited a moment. "Oh," she said, "I'm sorry, my name's Refkhah."

Then she faced Carissa fully with a fairly perplexed expression. "God just told me we're about to become best friends," she whispered to Carissa. She looked no less perplexed.

Carissa smiled. "So you're the one."

After a full evening of laughter and new friendship, Carissa was ready to sleep. By the time she crawled into bed, she was very, although peacefully, tired. It was a wonderful thing that Carol had kept Arelia.

After she'd apparently slept for quite awhile, Carissa awoke with a fairly troubling dream. Remembering Arelia's dream about Jesus' coming to their home, she decided to take this dream seriously.

The Lord was weeping. He sat in a gorgeous, but private garden, unable to control His tears. As Carissa watched the very intimate, although not quite real, sequence within her mind, the dream continued after she awoke.

Fascinated, she watched the vision of her Lord in the throes of sorrow. She'd never actually seen anyone weep the way He did.

In her vision, Jesus stood to His feet and began to pace angrily.

His expression changed from deep sorrow to the picture of active rage. "It's time, Father," He said, placing His crown upon His head. "I'm ready."

THIRTY

"Carissa," God said, awakening her late the next morning. "Carol will be here in a few minutes. Refkhah wants to talk with you as well. Please arise."

In her heavy sleepiness, Carissa simply wanted to shake herself awake. Something other than her dreams, it seemed had happened.

"Father, was I still dreaming about Your Son's anger?"

"It wasn't just a dream, Care."

"Ooh," Carissa winced. Her sleepiness suddenly vanished.

"My Spirit opened your eyes to His state as you slept. Refkhah is also very upset. She needs your loving assistance."

Carissa bolted from her covers and began getting ready. "What's happened, Father?"

"Refkhah met someone at the party last night who'd just lost her son to suicide when the Rapture happened. Jesus was told the story after the party disbanded."

The sound of God's very heavy sigh could be heard.

Carissa stopped her preparations and asked him, "Is everything okay?"

There was a pause Carissa couldn't quite comprehend.

"The reason for this man's suicide," the Lord God continued, "brought on enough of My Son's anger... He wants to begin the Believer's Judgement. Now."

God paused once again. The silence was difficult to hear.

"Refkhah," He continued, "wept for hours. The woman--her name is Johanna--was in a panic. She was certain her son wasn't in heaven. She..." God caught His breath, "had been told, just before the Rapture, and very harshly, he wouldn't be."

Carissa drew in a deep breath.

"The truth is, the man is mine. He's here, but he doesn't want to speak with his family... for the way he and his children were treated by them."

"He won't forgive them, Father?"

"It isn't that, Care." God stopped with a soft sigh. "His grown daughters will endure the Tribulation. They didn't make it... because of what his family had done... in My Son's name."

"As you can imagine, the man, Robert, is grieving... It's too late for his girls."

"The point now is... My Son is greatly angered. His rule will be built on better things than this. I know My Son. He wants to begin His Kingdom by making an example of what not to do."

"We will rule with Him in the Millennial Reign," Carissa whispered. "They need to know His heart."

"Yes." God's own voice carried the sound of anger. Carissa understood. He was filled with very reasonable and very righteous indignation.

She also understood... As a nation of God's people, their disobedience, and most likely hers, had led to very real

consequences for more people than themselves.

THIRTY ONE

The Lord Jesus stood pacing the balcony of His palace home. His anger had softened, but His sorrow remained.

"What am I to do with My people?" He spoke aloud to His Father. "They don't even know what they've done. They aren't even aware."

A fresh round of tears flowed. He was weary of weeping. "My heart longs for mercy both for them and from them. I long to teach them loving care for each other."

His mild tears became a torrent of weeping. "I've always understood their lack of understanding," He said; His voice rough with the strength of His emotion. "I understand them still. I want to love them more than... and I did."

He turned His face upward, toward the soft rain now falling more fully, allowing the cool drops to wash away the remnants of His sorrow.

"How can I teach them effectively, Father? How can I reach into their pride and change the direction they've chosen? You are My Father. I look to You now."

"Son, My heart grieves as well. My soul would also have mercy. I am..." God stopped as the rain picked up force in timing with His heart.

Jesus sighed, wiping tears with both hands. "Some have learned," He said sorrowfully, "I don't want to ignore those who've worked so hard to do the right thing.

"Others have ignored My Word, preferring instead flattery and...

the honor men. They are yet Mine, but they don't realize how much damage they've done, and how much they're about to lose."

"I'm just beginning the work to be done," Jesus continued with a sense of tearful frustration.

"Dealing, Father, with this level of heartlessness... I know they're no longer drenched in their sin, but... how? How among all these expectant people, can I affect true change from the inside out? From their hearts?"

A moment passed as He paced the rain drenched balcony. "I want to honor the honorable. I want to forgive those who've needed more forgiveness. But I do not want to cave into these things!"

"My Kingdom, Your Kingdom, Father, must be built on things that matter."

Jesus picked up His chalice of clear, fresh water. "You are what I want to build into their souls... Your love, Your kindness, Your great wisdom..."

"Help Me, Father, to get this job done."

THIRTY TWO

As the morning drew on, Carissa pondered her dreams and God's words very seriously. Nothing Carissa encountered interrupted her many thoughts.

The things God had told her she'd been assigned to learn were obviously meant for those He had chosen for leadership. She was beginning to catch on to the magnitude of the work the Lord Jesus had yet to accomplish.

Her own position wasn't a matter of glamour. It was a very necessary part of how Jesus and His Father could accomplish their plans.

Her responsibilities were somewhat important. But only as important as those men and women who'd been chosen for their gravely necessary leadership.

They were the ones who were desperately needed to affect this level of preparation for the Millennium. She wondered what kind of people God would choose as leaders.

Carissa thought back on some of the phenomenal people she'd known. She'd had one friend whose faithfulness was astounding. Even into her 70s this incredible sister had worked herself to the point of exhaustion helping others without much thought to herself.

This dear sister had also arisen very early every morning in order to pray for several hours for the needs of many people. She'd affected, through God's listening ear, very important changes around her. She'd also wept soundly for the needs of God's servants everywhere.

Another had given away massive wealth until it was completely gone. She'd spent her last days sorrowful that she couldn't give more.

Both of these women had prayed without comment as she'd struggled through her own extreme difficulties, often at her own cause.

Without condemnation, they'd offered their perspectives. And then prayed for her throughout the years. She'd never been completely alone.

Carissa's life had been lonely. Since Frank didn't want her to work, apart from the service she'd been able to do, she'd spent most of her life at home alone.

They couldn't have children, and Frank wasn't interested in church. These things had lent to undesired self-absorption. Carissa's heart had been to help, but it seemed God had had other plans.

Right now, it seemed even her life of near isolation had been part of her training for this very hour. It had created within her a strong desire to do exactly what she was now being trained to do.

The old "paint the fence, polish the car" scene from that karate movie so many years ago came to mind. She'd had to learn, through many misunderstood means, how to prepare for the life she now had.

She wondered now how many "small" people had been trained by their blind obedience to God and His Word. And for which kinds of leadership.

Carissa had been blindsided by her place in Christ's Kingdom. She'd known there would be rewards for obedience, but this was far beyond expectation.

Her old prideful assumptions from a time long ago seemed painfully out of touch with reality now.

The actual rewards God had given her, she knew, were in no way due to legalistic obedience, but due to obedience of the heart. Submission to whatever God had wanted. Whether it made sense to her or not.

In her life she'd grown to understand, obedience to Christ was less a matter of performance, and more a matter of trustfully becoming. Her true accomplishments had been despite her pitiful endeavors at righteousness.

She'd failed. That was certain. And how. Still, she'd redirected her heart to take hold of God's hand... And keep on walking no matter how many times and ways she'd fallen.

As she neared Refkhah's place in her Brother's palace, Carissa drew in a deep breath. She wasn't certain how she would be of assistance, but she was aware she would be somehow.

She'd practiced painting that fense, and polishing that car for an incredible number of years. Apparently, her submission had done its work. She'd learned enough for God Himself to invite her into His Son's family.

This was a responsibility, and a reward, were well beyond her comprehension.

THIRTY THREE

(The depictions within this chapter are based in true knowledge and personal experience.)

When Refkhah opened to Carissa, she wasn't alone. A black man dressed in modern era, American clothing sat on her couch bent over with his hands clasped together.

"Hi, Carissa," Refkhah said sadly. It was apparent she'd been weeping for many hours. The man showed signs of having wept long hours himself.

"Good morning, Refkhah," Carissa said softly. She attempted to keep her voice somber for their sakes.

The man rose to his feet sadly and shook her hand. "I'm Bill Forrest," he said without fanfare.

Carissa nodded her response. "Carissa Littleton, but my friends call me Care."

The man snickered a little. Carissa didn't flinch. "Does the name mean something to you?"

"It's my nickname," she said shyly. "The reality that God uses it with me means more than anything else."

He tilted his head to the side with a contemplative look. "Bill's my nickname," he said with a sense of regret. "Doesn't mean anything at all."

"It did to your parents," she said with a gentle smile.

"You're right, actually," he said. "I was named after my grandfather. His ministerial position was important to them

both." He sat down once again.

Carissa nodded in acknowledgement.

"Please, Carissa, come sit with us." Refkhah's voice seemed much heavier than it was at the party.

"Thank you," Carissa said softly as she took her place in a chair beside where they sat facing each other.

Bill stood to his feet and began pacing. "We have a need Carissa that Refkhah's Brother believes you can fill."

Carissa shook her head. "How can I help?" she asked.

Refkhah spoke next. "God told us you understood what happened after the party."

Carissa merely nodded.

"Yeah," Refkhah said standing to pace the floors herself. "My heart is broken," she said, wiping silent tears. "My new friend, Bill, was a man of great courage in a position of great helpfulness," she stopped, allowing a sob to escape.

When she couldn't continue, Carissa stood to her feet. She felt like hugging the woman, but understood this was inappropriate.

Her face apparently said enough. Refkhah ran toward her with an embrace.

Bill turned toward them and began to wipe tears. "I held a position, after working as a missionary, where I was responsible for praying for the better part of every day on the job."

Carissa understood. "I've called prayer partners myself," she said.

The man nodded, acknowledging her perspective. He then continued. "If it hadn't been for the gravity of the needs..." he stopped, wiping a new round of tears, "I could never have done what I did."

Refkhah held her hands to her face. The look of compassion on her features was nearly beyond any Carissa had witnessed.

Bill continued. "Many times each and every day!" he stopped momentarily, "I prayed with men and women on the edge of suicide. Over, and over, and over, and... Over!

"It never seemed to end!"

Once Refkhah found her voice, she jumped in. "Jesus, my Lord and half Brother... This is what He knew at the time Johanna stopped Him to weep of her fears."

Bill sighed very heavily. "We all have a very sober job ahead of us. Jesus," he said, "knew far more than I did." He blew air out of his mouth very strongly. "There are so many among us who've suffered the same reality Johanna's son had."

"Every single day, for many, many years, " Refkhah said in a tone of disbelief, "God's people were driven to the point of suicide..." she stopped, taking in a sobbing breath. She lowered her head in a grave sense of the powerful reality. Then she finished her sentence in anger... "and beyond."

Carissa felt a heavy sadness. "No wonder He wept as He did in my dream."

Refkhah laughed with a tone of indignation. "Not in your dream alone," she confirmed, "His weeping is still going strong."

"Wow," Carissa whispered. "How can I help?"

At this point, God's voice joined them. "Care," He said, "I'm a powerful God."

"Yes," Carissa nodded.

"This is one reason I've chosen to allow a reversal of plans. I'd intended to judge some first who could be an example of what I treasure. That's no longer what I want."

Carissa nodded once again. "Father," she said with a sense of panic, "what can I possibly do?"

"We'll have great need of soft healing all throughout My Kingdom," He said. "You and Refkhah can reach out to those who still require more than a perfect environment."

Carissa looked at Refkhah. "That would be phenomenal," she said strongly.

"Thank you!" Refkhah said as genuinely as anyone could.

THIRTY FOUR

After a full morning of weeping and serious conversation, Carissa's heart was overwhelmed with sorrow. Arelia, she hoped, would be okay.

Carissa was supposed to have taken her child home early in the morning. Care was concerned her daughter would need not to be aware of the reasons for both her late arrival and her sad demeanor.

At the same time, Carissa wondered, with a good state of panic, how she could mother Arelia while performing such an important calling.

She thought maybe she should speak with Carol about it. Carol had been a mother, she just might know what Carissa should do.

When she opened her door to Carissa, Carol's face held a look of concern. "Hi, Care," she said soberly. Then she tilted her head to one side, indicating her daughter.

Arelia lay on her tummy, head buried in her arms, kicking her toes against the couch where she apparently awaited Carissa having just a tiny bit of a tantrum.

Carissa struggled to stifle a chuckle. "Arelia?" she asked softly.

"What?!"

Arelia's single word protest was literally couched in loving sorrow, muffled strongly by her unwillingness to look up from her situation.

"I'm sorry, darling," Care said sweetly. Then she sighed. "Mommy has a new job. I was talking to someone who really needed me."

Still muffled by her buried position, Arelia's response was darling. "Do I get to need you?" she said with a muffled whimper.

Carissa felt terrible. She walked over to the couch and sat beside her fidgeting daughter. "Yes," she said softly. "Can I hug my treasured princess?"

Arelia sat up sniffing, and buried her head in Carissa's tummy as she hugged her soundly.

Her daughter began to weep. Carissa stroked her hair tenderly. "I'm sorry, little princess," she said with great reticence. "Mommy will try to be better next time."

Carissa gazed up at Carol helplessly. "What can I do?" she mouthed to her friend. "Miss Carol," Carissa ventured, "you've been a great mommy, and you had a big job as a pastor's wife. How can I be a better mommy to Arelia?"

Carol looked away sadly. She bit her lip, apparently trying hard not to cry.

Carissa looked at her friend with compassion.

Tears began to fall as Carol looked back at Carissa with compassion of her own. "Miss Carissa," Carol said with soft sorrow, "don't neglect your children for anything. I know. It's my experienced wisdom," Carol stopped for a moment, biting her lip once again. "Your job will always be waiting. There'll always be so many needs to fill. Your daughter, Princess Arelia, will grow up and be gone. She needs you now. Later will be too late."

Carissa wanted to cry. She hugged her daughter instead, and kissed the top of her head. "You're so right, Miss Carol," she said

with a sigh. "Thank you for your great wisdom."

Carissa's voice carried her own bit of shame. She understood. Carol was very, very right.

THIRTY FIVE

Arelia played joyfully in their living room. It seemed her ability to forgive was immediate and complete. It also seemed she needed some of her own time to adjust.

Carissa had work to be complete. She thought the time Arelia needed was an opportune time to finish her work.

Figuring out how not to neglect her daughter's young needs, Carissa knew, would require God's help, and soon.

At the moment, she needed to silence her own self-neglect. Carissa was very overwhelmed. She needed some time to recuperate. Fully.

She also knew if she didn't care sufficiently for both her daughter and herself, she'd be no use to anyone else down the line.

As she pondered the strength of the needs she'd face, she was fully aware they could soundly change her in ways that weren't good.

For some unknown reason, she couldn't bring herself to call on God. This was disturbing to her, but it was also reality.

With a sigh Carissa fixed herself a strong cup of chocolate mint coffee. Unlike her usual preference, this time she added cream and honey.

It was marvelous. She leaned her head back against her chair, and drank a full gulp of the hot liquid. It tasted phenomenal.

There were so many things clamoring for her attention, at least within her heart and mind. At this moment, she refused to consider a single one of them.

"Carissa," God said to her softly, "don't you think this time of recuperation is also part of your training?"

Carissa sighed and then smiled. She wanted to hug her Daddy God. 'Thanks,' she said with another sigh.

"When..." the Lord said in a Fatherly tone, "not if, but when..." He stopped for a second. "When you fail, in any way, it can become part of your training and your later success."

The smile on Carissa's face grew wider. She chuckled in response. "You're absolutely right," she said. "It's true, isn't it, Father? We all learn from our mistakes."

'Yup," God's voice was certain and strong. Right about now, Carissa felt a need for His strength.

"Climb up into My lap, Care," He said with loving kindness.

Carissa chuckled. "What lap?" she teased.

God's voice sounded with His own laughter.

"You laugh?!" Carissa asked with strong amusement.

"Of course I do!" His response was teased with a touch of sheer joy. "I made you in My image."

Carissa giggled. "That you did," she said as her own joy began to grow stronger.

"Do you think I'm any less in demand than you are?"

God's question made her stop and think. "Do You have need to recuperate sometimes?"

God's knowing chuckle answered her question. "More in My image than some believe," He said with a firm confirmation.

"Wow," Carissa sighed. "Who'd a thunk!"

God chuckled yet again. "I'm not as heartless as you may have thunk," He said with a sound of mock exasperation.

With all this day's lessons, Carissa was sure her restful time was a necessity. Such, she understood, would be part of her life for eternity. God's restful traits were something to consider.

THIRTY SIX

After only a week or so, Carissa was beginning to take hold of the ideas and needs that required her thought.

Jordi stopped by without even a knock on her door. Carissa shook her head at his intrusion. "And you can't even knock?" she asked him.

"I can," he said with mild irritation. "The question is not can I, but will I."

Carissa shook her head with mild dismay. "Jordi!" she reprimanded, "please!" She clucked her tongue as she shook her head disapprovingly. "I ask you then, Jordi, knock before entering!"

Jordi chuckled and then sighed. "If I must," he said.

"Yes, my friend," Carissa said strongly. "You must."

"Don't you want to hear what I have to say?"

"Yeah," Carissa sighed. "Please."

"Michael, Gabriel, Dawn, Serino, and I came up with a great plan to help you and Refkhah."

"Really?"

Jordi looked upset by her question. "Yes," he said with mild agitation.

"Tell me, Jordi, please, if you will." She added the last part to

please his sense of autonomy.

"We want you to host a huge party for the angels Michael thinks can help."

Carissa lifted an eyebrow. "That's a great idea!" she gasped.

"We aren't all useless," he said with chagrin.

"No," Carissa shook her head in wonder at the thought of their idea. "You certainly aren't."

"Gabriel thought of it first, I must admit."

"Well it's a stunning idea!" Carissa stopped what she'd been doing and thought it through a moment. "That would allow the guardian angels who know who's had the roughest times to..." she stopped, still considering the idea.

"That's exactly right," Jordi said with a 'you should know that' attitude. "We'll be planning the first stage of the idea tomorrow," he said.

"Will I be needed?"

"Later," Jordi said still glowering a touch, "but not yet. You'll be needed once we decide which angels should be there."

Carissa nodded. She believed it. This was a phenomenal idea. Those angels who'd watched certain people suffer would know exactly what they'd need.

THIRTY SEVEN

Carissa's attempt to plan out her day kept being interrupted. It wasn't until she sat down and asked God the reason, she began to comprehend there was a reason.

God's quiet demeanor filled her with soundly worshipful love.

"My daughter," He said with utmost love and softness, "you'll receive a summons to My Son's court proceedings today."

Carissa gasped. "I will?" she exclaimed softly.

"I want you to be there, Care," He said. "But you must be there very, very quietly." God sighed in a loving way. "Your leadership position requires your sufficient understanding."

Carissa shook her head briefly and felt a wave of incredulity.

"Okay," she said simply.

"You'll need, My kind daughter, to remain completely silent. It's My Son's voice, and Mine through Him, that needs to be heard, not yours.

Carissa was well aware of the reasons for God's admonition. "I'll just be a fly on the wall," she said with a soft sigh. "What a privilege!"

The Lord God chuckled. "There aren't any flies here," He said, apparently amused. "But you can be a Carissa on the wall."

The Father continued. "My Son will make a very soft example of one of the men responsible, unintentionally, for several suicides.

Most of these deaths were very unintentional," God sighed.

"The crux of the problem among those who were truly mine..." He stopped, sighing heavily once again, "was that they were following the teachings and examples of wolves in sheep's clothing."

Carissa lowered her head in strong emotion.

"They followed men and women instead of My Word."

"We walk by faith, not by sight," Carissa quoted.

"Yes," God said. "It was my strongest test for My people."

"I saw that..." Carissa sighed, "sometimes."

"Michael will be here momentarily. I wanted to warn you to be ready when he comes."

"How, Lord?"

"There's a white linen robe in your closet. I want you to wear it, along with the royal purple sash also hanging on the hanger. Dress in these, with no jewelry or other embellishments."

"This not about you, in any other way than for your training. I love you, but these proceedings are for My Kingdom. they're not a form of entertainment."

"Yes, Siir," she breathed. "I can do that."

"Arelia will go with Sue today. It's already in the works. I want your full attention on what's happening. Your daughter will be just fine.

"This," He continued, "is My will for a time. Are you ready to get

ready?"

Carissa nodded. She was.

THIRTY EIGHT

There was a quiet stir as those responsible for various court activities bustled around the courtroom.

The rooms the Lord was about to enter were simple and clerically functional. A large white desk, very similar to what she'd seen in portrayals of American courtrooms, stood high and opposing.

No one said a word.

Although there were hundreds of people and angels in the stands that climbed every side of the facing walls, not so much as a sniffle was heard from the crowd.

Carissa wasn't certain whether this might be the very first appearance of the Lord as Judge.

Michael had been completely silent about any part of what was to happen. Carissa was nearly sure everyone had been warned as she had.

All at once a door opened near the outside edge of the wall where the desk along with another huge, golden throne awaited His Majesty.

Every angel and servant in the room that wasn't already seated and unable, fell to the floor, bowing in silence.

Tears welled up in Carissa's eyes. She feared for the man who was about to be judged. She didn't dare breathe.

The Lord Jesus strode into the room, silently looking over His desk. Then Michael stood to his feet. "The King of kings and Lord of lords! The Judge of judges! His Majesty, King Jesus!"

Every soul kept completely quiet.

The Lord gazed around the room in soberness.

Then a gavel was presented. Jesus took the gavel. With a look of angry determination, He raised the gavel and brought it down sharply.

"The Judgement of the Church!" He said soundly. "Let the proceedings commence."

A door, opposite the one the Lord had come through, opened. Every eye stared somberly at the man who entered.

The man walked in, seeming cocky. It was as if he expected he was first due to his many accomplishments.

The Lord looked angrily at His desk. "Bring forth the Book of Remembrance," He said with obvious rage.

The man seemed to soften his pride.

The Judge of all the Earth gazed at him with fiery anger. "You're lucky, my friend," He said firmly, "to be here at all."

The man shrank back and nearly stumbled. Michael took hold of his arm with sternness. "Remain standing," he said firmly. The man stood as best he could. The look on his face was one of sheer and humble recognition. It was apparent he understood he wasn't first because Jesus had appreciated what he had done.

He started to sigh. Michael warned him sternly without a single

word.

Jesus turned away from the man. From Carissa's standpoint, it was obvious His emotions of mercy were challenging His resolve to make a strong example of this man.

Carissa's heart melted. Not for the man, but for the Lord. She knew He was a man of great mercy. She also knew, He could not back down.

THIRTY NINE

The Lord Jesus turned back to face the man. "My people will thoroughly know of your name."

The man's lips quivered in response. He looked as if he wanted to speak. Again, Michael's stern gaze seemed to prevent him.

"Do you know why you've been called first?" the Lord asked him.

He shook his head. Apparently he knew better than to speak.

"I have spent many centuries," Jesus said, "trying to reach people in need of My love."

The man shifted uncomfortably. It appeared he might not be able to stand.

At the Lord's nod, Gabriel approached him. He looked fearful. Without a word, Gabriel touched the man. Immediately, he seemed to recover his strength.

"Do you have any idea," Jesus said, "what prevented Me from reaching them?"

The man being judged shook his head in great fear.

"Men like you, sir!" He leaned toward the man briefly.

Again, the man seemed to lose his strength.

"Women like your wife!" Jesus said in a direly commanding voice.

The man fearfully gazed around the room.

"You do not yet understand what I'm saying!?"

"No, Lord," he whimpered. "I'm sorry!"

Jesus shook His head in amazement. "It's too late now," He said. "You are who you've made yourself." He shook His head, taking papers up in His hand.

The man's face fell. "What did I do?" he whispered faintly.

Jesus looked down at His desk. "Give him the papers," He said to Gabriel.

Gabriel walked over to the desk. He took a set of papers from the Lord's hand. Carrying them to him, the man took them from Gabriel, trembling strongly.

"Do you know this man?" Jesus asked him. The Lord's lips were tight as He waited for the man's reply.

"Someone I excommunicated," he said. It became apparent he disagreed with the Lord's assessment.

"Why?!" Jesus asked angrily.

The man remained seemingly confident of his reasons.

"He was a despicable sinner!" he spat.

"Unworthy of My mercy?" Jesus challenged.

The man set the papers down on a table before him. "In my opinion," he said with a look of disdain.

The Lord's fury became acute. "Do you realize you were the reason he shot himself? Your wife taught his family to treat his children! his children! with enough disdain..." Jesus seemed to need to pause... "They aren't here." The Lord's face grew

sorrowful. "His heart is broken. So, Pastor Jones, is Mine."

Jesus' face held an expression of very determined anger.

"Robert," the Lord continued, "will be My good friend." There was a moment as Jesus stood glaring at him.

The man made a disgusted face. Carissa couldn't believe his arrogance.

Jesus began to sing an old hymn... "Jesus, Friend to sinners..." but He couldn't finish His words.

He turned from the room of people, toward the back wall where He faced no one. His body began to move with obvious sobs. Carissa's heart wanted to weep with Him.

The Lord wiped His tears. Then He turned back toward the man. "Your name," He said, "will represent the powerfully ugly means some! of My people employed... despite what I did for all mankind.

"You, pastor Jones, will lower your gaze as you gape upon prostitutes, tax collectors, and every other kind of sinner I died for... and they become My friends."

With these words, the Lord retreated in strength. Carissa was certain He wept behind closed doors.

FORTY

There were so many things yet to be done. Carissa's love for her Savior had grown with her deeper understanding of His love for the smallest among His people. Her hope at this moment was to grow in understanding His level of commanding mercy.

Pastor Jones had had a rough trial. Both Jesus and His Father had retreated. It seemed to her their hearts had needed to hide from the vulnerability brought on by strong love.

Above all else, she wanted to know God better. She knew beyond a shadow of a doubt it was He that would truly make the greatest difference in the hearts of those still broken by their old lives.

The Lord, in all His fullness, was truly and definitely their answer.

How she would work with Jordi, Serino, Dawn, and all the many other guardian angels, while working with their astonishing differences, was beyond her at the moment. Jordi's idea that it should be fine for him to simply enter her home was astonishing indeed.

Yet she rather understood his reasons. He was millions of years old! She understood this would definitely bring a very different perspective. He'd also lived among humans as an invisible being. Completely unhindered and unrestricted. This, she believed, was his reason for misunderstanding her requirements.

She chuckled with the thought. Jordi's was a very different perspective. His attitude had been shocking to her. As hers had been irritating to him.

Growing to understand and effectively work with this level of difference would probably present some issues. They'd expect each other, thoroughly, to catch on to their own very different ideas about life.

She suspected one of the first things she'd need to do was to help both sides understand each other. They'd never be able to work together if they didn't.

The thought was enough to make her giggle. It would probably be nearly impossible. Their common goal of healing for mankind would be their most cohesive force.

As she sat down to jot down her thoughts, someone knocked on her door.

"Arelia, honey, could you answer the door for mommy?"

Care could hear the sound of her daughter's shoes clicking on the flooring. "Yes, mommy," she said with the sound of delight.

A woman's voice filtered into her kitchen. "Is your mama home, please?"

Carissa arose to catch the woman as she entered. Her voice seemed in somewhat of a panic.

"Can I help you?" Carissa asked.

"A woman I met today said you could help me," she said wiping back a wisp of her hair.

"If I can," she responded, "I certainly will... Who sent you?"

"She said her name was Rebecca in English. I couldn't pronounce it in her own language."

"Ah, Refkhah," Carissa said. "The Lord's sister."

"Oh!" she said with great surprise. "I had no idea."

Carissa felt a little like she probably shouldn't have let that cat out of the bag.

"I'm sure she didn't want to make a big thing out of it," she said, backpedaling as best she could after the fact.

"I'm Sharon," she said.

"What can I do for you, Sharon?"

"I heard you're in charge of connections," she said as if afraid she might have the wrong person.

"Yes," Carissa said. "How may I be of assistance to you?"

"I have a guardian angel?" she asked. Her demeanor was one of uncertainty.

"Yes," Carissa said softly. She was aware the woman seemed to feel completely unworthy. "Everyone does." Carissa hesitated.

"Could I contact someone who could connect you with yours?"

"That would be incredible!" The lady's expression was one of pure and very humble gratitude.

Carissa was ready to fly, although not literally, to her aid.

FORTY ONE

Awaking with a start, Carissa's ears tuned into something unusual. The sound of something similar to a distant motor didn't strike her at all as a heavenly sound.

At first she thought maybe she was awaking from her new life back into the nightmare of the life she'd been rescued from. She considered maybe her new life had just been a beautiful dream.

This brought a sense of strong disappointment combined with much stronger panic.

"What?" she said faintly.

God's presence filled her with assurance she was still in heaven. "It's just the sound of a young boy playing with an old fashioned motorized plane."

God's voice was far more reassuring than anything else at the moment.

"Wow," she breathed. "I almost thought I was still..."

"No, Care, not at all," her Father said. "Do you see?" He asked her.

Carissa thought maybe she did. "This is the way some people still feel here, isn't it?"

"Yes, Carissa," He said.

"Ouch!" she whispered turning over under her blankets. "I guess I was lucky to have counseling and other kinds of help."

"Very few of those who needed such help received it Carissa," He confirmed.

"Father, that lady yesterday, Sharon... Did Jordi set her up?"

"He did," but her angel's only part of her solution. She requires much more help."

"I'd like to help her... In my own way."

"As you can imagine, Carissa, there are many social workers, counselors, psychologists and the like here among us."

Carissa sat up with a start. "There would be!" she said.

"Jordi had an idea last night, after you and Sharon spoke with him."

"Tell me," she said. Her heart was beginning to catch the idea.

"You got it," He said with a chuckle. "Connections."

"Yeah!" she exclaimed. Her new job was becoming a delight. Connecting people with angels and other kinds of help. What a beautiful way to live!

FORTY TWO

After nearly seven years of working and learning in many, many directions, Carissa Littleton was ready for what was about to happen.

The Millennial Reign was ready to begin. Every single soul in heaven had been sufficiently prepared.

Carissa had watched with wonder as those she'd grown to know had blossomed into the sweetest, most beautiful people under the mighty hand of God.

The last little bit of preparation had more to do with the Kingdom to come. Those who would rule with the Lord Jesus were very ready to take their places.

Over the years her Lord had become a somewhat distant Friend. Jesus' ability to work with His Father and the powerful Spirit of God had made His heavenly Kingdom an astonishing place to grow and heal.

Today, as Carissa and Arelia, who was now twelve, spoke softly of their respective plans, life seemed on the edge of something wondrous.

Nothing had been as sweet as her time here. At least to date.

As the years had passed, Carissa's excitement had grown incredibly. God's awesome love, His great patience and wisdom had grown more and more apparent and more and more appreciated.

Areliia, Sue, Carol, and their angels had gathered in Carissa's home for a Preparation Party. The prep was done. The party was more of a send off. They'd work together some in the future, but there would be millions more on earth in need of the very same helps each person in heaven had once required.

With many hugs and joyful tears, Carissa's cherished friends prepared for the changes in their lives.

Once their small party was nearly over. Carissa sat down with Jordi alone. Areliia had spent the "night" with Emily and her daughter. They'd grown to be best of friends.

"Jordi, my old, odd angel friend," Carissa said with a joyful tease, "what do you dream?"

Jordi started to chuckle. Then he grew serious. "I dream, my old, odd friend..." He stopped momentarily with a distant gaze. "I dream of learning more than ever before! There's so much to know! It's a never ending part of life."

Jordi reached over and planted one on Carissa's cheek.

"Jordi!" she gasped. Then she laughed full heartedly. "That's my first time!" She shook her head at the thought. "I didn't even think angels did such things."

"We don't," he said. "At least we didn't. I guess we've learned some human behavior."

Then he turned, looking back at Carissa. She knew she was about to lose a good friend. He'd be needed in his new capacity. Strongly. Gabriel and he had become good working friends.

Carissa caught her sob just a little. "Goodbye!" she said. But he'd

already disappeared.

FORTY THREE

The day had finally come. Just as Carissa had found herself hovering over the Earth in the clouds at the Rapture, now she awaited the Lord's command for the millions and millions of readied believers to reverse their original course and take their places once again upon the earth.

Because she and Refkhah had become very best friends, Carissa would be living in the New Jerusalem. She'd have the opportunity of her lifetime... so far.

She and Refkhah waited in the palace ballroom where so many people awaited the moment. Jesus was speaking animatedly with someone Care did not know. He looked as excited as she'd ever seen Him.

When the time came, Jesus, Michael and Gabriel called everyone together.

All were dressed in white robes. The Lord's robe was garnished with a golden sash.

An angel brought in a white horse dressed in gold finery. His crest was made of beautiful, ornate gold, shimmering under the light that emanated from everywhere all throughout heaven, but particularly the palace.

Everyone's excitement was nearly tangible. After stilling the roar of the crowd with a loud trumpet blast, Michael retreated, and the Lord addressed the crowds.

"My servants," He said with a glorious smile, "we are about to embark on our eternal destiny."

Someone coughed a little in the crowd. Every head turned the direction of the sound.

Jesus merely laughed. He was very happy. Then He continued.

"If you'll think back with Me, remember how ugly the Earth had become. The pollution, the weather events, wars upon wars and so many other deeply disturbing things we all had to suffer.

"It's going to be true once again. You will not see it for long. My Father has given all power in My hands. I will speak the word, and the Earth will be healed. It will be on Earth as it is in heaven.

"Don't be overcome when you see what has happened. It's been very difficult for every soul on Earth.

"That time is now over. It'll never happen again. All will eventually be healed and glorious!

"Well?" He said excitedly. "Shall we?"

All at once Carissa found herself standing in a dark and horrifying environment. There was very little sunlight. The air was filthy and screaming with some kind of chemical residue.

Everyone in her company gasped. Carissa held her hand to her mouth, not in self protection for the obvious gasses that permeated the air, but for what the world had obviously suffered.

It was a terrifying scene. Hardly a plant remained. The Earth was barren. Any souls that remained were well hidden with one exception. The battle of Armageddon was well under way.

The people of Israel were calling out to God with one voice. The sound of their weeping could be heard from well above the planet.

Carissa could see the Lord Jesus on His white horse. His expression was one of exasperation. Everyone else was in agreement.

As they hovered by the millions, if not billions, the sky grew dense with people and angels.

Just before dismounting from His horse, Jesus shouted. The sound of His voice reverberated around the world. And probably far beyond.

The Earth began to quake and all at once, it changed from one end of the skies to the other.

The Earth in every aspect began to roll with the changes. It seemed to unfurl in awesome splendor.

Trees, grasses, every beautiful thing. It looked just like heaven that first day to Carissa.

Then everyone shouted. It was finished. And yet...

There was so much more wonderful work to be done.

With a heart filled with great jubilation, Carissa joined her brothers and sisters in Christ for the beginning of a new beginning.

Eternity had taken it's very last step.

The Kingdom of the Lord had come, and His wife, the true Church, had made herself ready.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE BORN AGAIN

This is the most important part of this book. Please, if you will, read it prayerfully. Blessings in Jesus' name as you read and put this into practice!

Most people believe what we do will either get us into heaven or prevent us from getting there. But the Bible tells us something different. It tells us that going to heaven is a gift from God. It says, "The wages (what we earn) of sin (anything wrong we do) is death, but the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. " (Romans 6:23 KJV).

It also says, "for it is by grace you are saved through faith and that not of (good works)... " (Ephesians 2:8-9 KJV).

Our status before God can best be shown in a story..

It's as if we have a debt before God when we die or when the Rapture occurs. Our debt must be paid before we can go to heaven.

The wages of everything we've ever done wrong is death. Our bill before God says, "you lied, you stole a loaf of bread, you slept with someone outside of marriage..." Each sin we commit is like one line on our bill. We owe death for each and every one of them. There's no hope of getting to heaven on our own. No hope at all. Until we understand what Jesus did on the cross.

He paid for our debt. He offers us an unlimited payment. A blank check. He not only paid for our wrongs, He offers to add to our account before God all the good things He ever did! He offers

this blank check to everyone on earth. All we have to do is reach out and accept His gift.

By accepting Him, we receive life eternal. (John 1:12 "Now to as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons (and daughters) of God, even to them that believe on His name." (KJV)

When we accept Jesus and His gift, we are given a brand new life, we are born of His Spirit (or born again) (John 3:3-18).

If you'd like to receive this gift, you could accept it through prayer right now. Your prayer could go something like this:

"Father in Heaven, our Creator God, I ask you to help me truly become your child as I pray right now. Please give me the gift you promised through Jesus' death in my place. He took my punishment so I wouldn't have to die but can live in heaven when I die physically or the Rapture comes. I accept You, Jesus, and the Spirit of God. I ask for that payment on my account and that I will go and be with You someday. I want to be your child, God. Please help me to be born into your kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen."

It's easy to receive a gift freely given. He has given you this gift. Walking with God is an everyday adventure. He keeps us strong when we remember Him daily. Read as much as you can of the Bible and be sure to pray every time you have a need. He will hear you. God Himself will lead you where you need to go.

Don't ever let go of Him and He will never let go of you. Someday, when Jesus returns for His people, He will come for you as well. Amen!